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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study aimed to identify reasons why people who identify as activists seek psychotherapy. The literature on social movements supports the claim that activists are highly motivated individuals who seek to create meaning through work to promote social change, and as a result are exposed to a complex array of social forces that are institutional and interpersonal. As a collective social behavior, involvement in social movements allows activists to develop strong relationships with others while also becoming exposed to the risks of conflict and disapproval of others. Given that these relational factors and the nature of their organizing work can create a variety of stressors for activists, the researcher devised research questions that sought to explore whether there are common factors, themes, or presenting problems when accessing a therapist.

The researcher presents findings from twelve semi-structured interviews with people who self-identify as activists and have participated in a social movement organization and psychotherapy within the last two years. The study's findings illustrate the highly meaningful nature of developing an activist identity for participants; conscientious and perfectionistic personality traits among participants; a variety of healthful and conflictual interpersonal dynamics participants have experienced through their work; the importance of hard work; the prevalence of eating disorders, compulsive behaviors, and experiential avoidance when seeking treatment. A broad theme of participants stretching their resources so thin such that when a confounding problem arises in their lives, psychotherapy functions as a useful resource; and that

activism is an important topic in therapy, though it is not discussed with the same level of depth with therapists as much as it is within friend networks.

This study's findings have the potential to promote development of interventions to treat symptoms seen in activists, education of psychotherapists on what issues are salient to activists when seeking treatment, and empowerment of activists in their work to promote social justice and social change. To promote the capacity of activists aligns with social work values that promote empowerment and social justice. As such, the study indicates the importance of clinical social workers and therapists to validate and affirm the meaning of activism in their clients' lives.

WHY ACTIVISTS SEEK PSYCHOTHERAPY

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Populist social movements have occurred throughout the course of U.S. history, ranging from slave rebellions to workers' movements to women's movements to the Civil Rights movement and anti-war movements (Zinn, 2001). This tradition continues to this day. The Occupy Wall Street movement (n.d.) that began in 2011 serves as a prominent contemporary example.

The nature of participation in social movements brings both rewards and considerable stress (Gousse-Lessard, Vallerand, Carbonneau, & Lafrenière, 2013; Valocchi, 2012), including the potential for burnout (Gomes, 1992; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Pines, 1994). Given the efficacy of psychotherapy, it seems that the activist may benefit from accessing psychotherapy as a source of healing when experiencing distressing affects (American Psychological Association, 2013; Wampold, 2007). This exploratory study elicited the narratives of people who self-identify as activists and as clients in psychotherapy to understand the factors that influence activists to seek psychotherapy.

This report's structure includes a literature review, a methodology section, a summary of findings that emerged from the study's qualitative interview process, and a discussion section that interprets the study's findings and answers its research questions.

Overview of the Literature Review

The literature review illustrates activism's function as a collective behavior, the importance of affect and emotion in social movements, a range of benefits and risks associated with activism, and psychotherapy as a resource for activists.

The researcher began the literature review by defining activism as a collective group process that aims to alter power structures in societies and create a broader range of possibilities for people's affects and experiences through the use of problem-solving behaviors (Corning & Myers, 2002; Dave, 2012; Holeman, 2007; Svirsky, 2010; Westaby, 2012).

The literature discusses that activists are highly motivated individuals who seek to find existential meaning through work aimed at creating social change (Pines, 1994), which involves mobilization to develop goals and identify resource needs (Valocchi, 2012). Activism emerges as a result of conditions that allow contentious political discourse to emerge (Gould, 2009; Rutland, 2013), and emotions and affect mobilize and empower activists to translate grievance into political action (Gould, 2009; Jasper, 2011).

People who are open to new experiences, perceive themselves as political subjects, and are conscientious tend to engage in activism (Curtin, Stewart & Duncan, 2010; Omoto, Snyder & Hackett, 2010). Developing an activist identity is an important experience for activists (Corrigall-Brown, 2012; Holeman, 2007; Horwitz, 1996). This identity is focused around practicing one's ethics and doing work that impacts future generations (Dave, 2012; Horwitz, 1996).

As a collective social phenomenon, relationships emerge as an important factor that sustains an activist's work (Gomes, 1992). It is no surprise then that finding an outlet to socialize with others is one reason activists report as a motivating factor for involvement in activism, and this phenomenon exists alongside economic needs and acting on personal values as prominent reasons why people engage in activism (Collom, 2011; Gomes, 1992; Valocchi, 2012).

In addition to building community, activism offers a range of benefits including empowerment, satisfaction, meaning-making, and developing protective factors against distress (Gilster, 2012; Gomes, 1992; Hughey, Peterson, Lowe, & Oprescu, 2008; Pines, 1994; Valocchi, 2012). A variety of risks are presented in the literature as well: distress due to conflict within social movement organizations (SMOs), creating rifts within social networks and family systems, alienation from one's social networks outside of SMOs, and frustration with activism (Dave, 2012; Gomes, 1992; Gousse-Lesard et al., 2013; Holeman, 2007; Jasper, 2011; Klandermans, 2009; Pines, 1994). The literature also indicates burnout is a major risk to activists (Gomes, 1992; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Pines, 1994; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011).

The literature discusses conflict, relational problems, frustration, and burnout as common negative emotional experiences facing activists (Gomes, 1992; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Pines, 1994; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011), which, as research on psychotherapy indicates, are experiences that therapy serves as a useful resource in treating (American Psychological Association, 2013; Gomes, 1992; Wampold, 2007). Though researchers such as James M. Jasper (2011) have written on collective experiences within social movements of anxiety and precipitating problems for depression, there seems to be a gap in the literature in terms of identifying specific presenting problems that influence activists to seek therapy.

Development of the Research Questions

The research question developed from the researcher's interest in gaining understanding as to whether any common factors lead activists to seek psychotherapy. The researcher self-identifies as an activist. The researcher gained interest in social movements as a child, reinforced this interest as a result of influential and critical perspectives of U.S. history that he learned in high school, and channeled these energies into participation in a variety of SMOs from

2001 to the present day. Throughout the course of his involvement, the researcher has had personal experience with a variety of stressors associated with movement work and has heard considerable discourse about the implications of burnout within social movements. As a result of social work training that functions to identify intersections between clinical psychotherapeutic practice and social action, the researcher approached the research component of his social work education with interest in identifying what intersections exist between the experiences of developing an activist identity, engagement in social movements, and the processes that lead an activist to decide to start psychotherapy.

The researcher utilized academic advising to refine his research questions: initially from his Research Methods professor, Jennifer Willett, MSW, during the 2013 summer session and then from his research advisor, Danna Bodenheimer, DSW, LCSW, during the 2013-14 academic year.

The researcher began with the hypothesis that activist burnout may be a potential factor, and then consulted the literature and his research advisor to explore whether other factors may serve as factors in this decision-making process. In consulting the literature, it was evident that the most salient factors for dissatisfaction or distress for activists were the relational factors (present in organizational cultures, family systems, and friend networks) and self-motivational factors (dissatisfaction within movements and high expectations for success). This helped the researcher develop research questions and interview guide questions that focus heavily on the nature of participants' experiences, experiences within their social networks, and experiences with group dynamics.

Given that these experiences and activists' involvement come in addition to family expectations, relationships, and paid work (if one's job is not activist-oriented), it is apparent that demands from those other realms of an activist's life can cause distress, which guided the researcher to inquire about whether extenuating demands on one's time can cause distress that leads to the decision to seek psychotherapy.

While activist burnout exists as a phenomenon, burnout is also a phenomenon that is not present in everyone who experiences stressful situations. The researcher presumed that it was a factor that would emerge in some of the interviews, but would not necessarily be a common factor. This led the researcher to develop the question about whether burnout is a factor in activist's decision to seek psychotherapy.

The interview guide (Appendix H) was structured such that the researcher would ask participants' to clarify their experiences if they mentioned burnout or discussed signs and symptoms of burnout. If participants' narratives did not insinuate they've experienced burnout, the researcher elected to focus on the relational and motivational factors participants experienced so as to not ask leading questions that would skew or bias the data.

Research Questions

As a result of the aforementioned research processes, and with the intention of filling the gap in the literature about reasons why activists seek psychotherapy, the researcher developed these research questions:

- Activists expose themselves to risks such as disappointment, lack of clarity in goals, high levels of expectations for success, and distress from SMO infighting. These can create distress with regard to the high levels of motivation and idealism that draw activists into

social movements, which can be treated through psychotherapy. Are there any common factors that contribute to an activist's decision to seek psychotherapy?

- Does SMO involvement in addition to competing pressures such as family and occupational responsibilities contribute to an activist's decision to seek psychotherapy?
- Given that the literature supports the existence of activist burnout (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Pines, 1994), do activists cite this in their decision to seek psychotherapy?

Overview of the Methodology

The researcher designed an exploratory study that utilized qualitative research methods in the form of interviews to identify reasons why activists seek psychotherapy. The researcher operationalized the definitions of an activist, a social movement, and psychotherapy, as is explained in more detail in the Methodology chapter.

The researcher recruited a sample utilizing non-probability purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling with approval from the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee. The study design required that participants live in the city in which the researcher lives so as to elicit rich data that would emerge from a shared community. The researcher is also a member of this shared community, which includes a variety of interconnecting social networks. The researcher's embeddedness provided advantages in the form of encouraging rapport with participants, which increased their willingness to share the richness and complexities associated with their personal narratives. Nonetheless, this does create sampling bias.

The researcher recruited participants with a variety of methods: e-mail and Facebook announcements, face-to-face dialogues, flyers, and referrals from other participants. The

researcher conducted interviews between February and April 2014, utilizing an open-ended interview style that was semi-structured, following an Interview Guide (Appendix H). The researcher concluded each interview by offering participants lists of resources and asking them to fill out a demographics questionnaire to elicit various responses as to how they self-identify. Participants represented a variety of sociocultural locations. Notably, nine of the 12 participants identify as queer, five identify as transgender or gender non-conforming, and all participants identify as white.

The researcher designed the study such that he would analyze the data utilizing phenomenological approaches to identify themes essential across all or most of the sample (Langdrige, 2007; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The researcher identified approximately 50 themes through open coding, assessed for broader themes utilizing axial coding, and identified a variety of themes that could be collapsed into one theme. The Findings Chapter outlines these themes, and the Discussion Chapter interprets them.

Overview of the Findings

Participants discussed a variety of experiences: developing an activist identity, factors that led them to seek therapy, and whether they discuss activism in therapy. Most dialogues closely mirrored the flow of the interview guide, with each type of experience having a differentiated dialogue from the others. These types of experiences included some intersections, with multiple participants naming how facets of their activist identity development related to their decision to seek therapy. If participants discussed these connections, they would name them without the researcher asking questions that would elicit such answers.

Themes presented followed the general trajectory of the interview format (Appendix H) and trajectory of the researcher's coding. Themes that emerged include the development of activist identity, the development of social networks, transformative and meaningful experiences, the importance of hard work and collaboration, a variety of experiences within family systems and other social networks, and concern about burnout. Notable outlying themes are drawn from two participants: one has potentially left activism and another intentionally has minimal involvement to balance the demands of their job.

Participants experienced a range of stressful situations that impacted their mood and anxiety levels, prompting all of them to seek psychotherapy at a variety of points in their lives. No consistent themes emerged as specific presenting problems in therapy, and the research identified commonalities between varieties of presenting problems in the Discussion chapter.

An intriguing finding that the researcher did not anticipate was the prevalence in the sample of participants' presenting problems including treatment for eating disorders and experiences with compulsive behaviors or experiential avoidance. The researcher cannot draw conclusions as to why this correlation exists, but discussed the possible reasons for this correlation in the Discussion Chapter.

Ten participants identified activism and associated interpersonal dynamics from within SMOs as a topic within therapy, and participants overall identified a disconnect between the amount of thought and energy they place into activism and how much they discuss it in therapy. Nonetheless, participants largely noted that their work done in therapy has helped them build and maintain their capacities as organizers.

Overview of the Discussion Chapter

The Discussion opens with a discussion as to the reasons why the study's findings promote social work values by identify reasons why those who promote social justice through activist work can benefit from mental health supports. Clinicians, especially clinical social workers, can enhance their capacity to promote social justice by understanding the ways in which activists who seek therapy can feel validated as a client, understanding common personality traits and experiences that such clients may experience, and to hold in mind types of statements that tend to make activists feel invalidated while in therapy so as to prevent ruptures in the therapeutic alliance.

The researcher also discusses how themes that emerged mirror Holeman's (2007) findings that activists often engage in volunteer work before feeling called to activist work. The researcher then discussed the importance of social support for participants, which is most healthfully facilitated through relationship building in activist work and supportive organizational and friend networks. Experiences in participants' family systems vary in nature and are often less supportive than the aforementioned networks.

The researcher then discussed the prevalence of hard work as a necessary theme in activists' narratives. As a result, burnout is a risk, and the researcher discussed how participants' concerns about preventing burnout is a salient theme, though the experience of burnout as a presenting problem in therapy is not a common theme given only two participants reported their activist burnout was so severe as to name it as a presenting problem in therapy.

The researcher subsequently discussed the nature of the prevalence of participants receiving treatment for eating disorders at a higher rate than the general population, the factors as to why the gap between prevalence rates may not be as great as it seems, and possible

intersections in terms of personality traits between populations of activists and people who experience eating disorders. The researcher is clear in noting that he cannot conclude any reasons as to why this correlation exists, and identifies that exploring the nature of this correlation stands as an area for future research.

While there are no common factors in terms of specific presenting problems in therapy, the researcher notes that there is a common theme across the sample that activists tend to fill the structure their lives with a variety of activities that can stretch their internal resources such that if relational problems or other stressful situations arise, they are prone to distress of such a nature that psychotherapy can function as a useful resource at that time. Activists are attuned to the importance of resources for people to utilize to maximize their capacities and well-being. Conversely, they present themselves as resourceful in utilizing a variety of resources to promote their own well-being, including the use of therapy.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The researcher consulted the literature on activist identity development, affect within social movements, benefits and risks of activism, and psychotherapy as a resource for activists.

In the following literature review, the researcher defines activism, identifies conditions that create the possibilities for activism, discusses personality traits common amongst activists, identifies motivating factors within social movement organizations (SMOs), identifies the benefits and risks of activism, discusses factors that influence activists to radicalize, discusses features of activism conducted by people who experience intersecting types of oppressions, discusses the phenomenon of burnout as experienced by activists, and identifies how psychotherapy functions as a resource for activists. These topics are important in understanding the various facets of an activist's experience while working to answer the research questions.

Defining Activism

Activism is a constructed process that opposes prevailing power structures in societies and communities, aiming to change the relationship between the public sphere's and institutional systems (Svirsky, 2010). Activism functions as an ethical practice, whereby activists operate in opposition to norms that arise in the social world, with the aim of inventing possibilities for affects that are traditionally unacceptable (Dave, 2012).

Westaby (2012) argues that social networks strive toward common goals and resources, with conflict arising as group members or other groups seek opposing goals. At a community or

societal level, activists operate within groups that create conflict with overarching institutional agendas in the hopes of attaining their goals (Westaby, 2012). As a group phenomenon, activism utilizes these conflicts as interventions to adjust social structures for the collective good (Gilster, 2012). As a result of the action required to enact activism, “activist orientation is defined as an individual’s developed, relatively stable, yet changeable orientation to engage in various collective, social-political, problem-solving behaviors spanning a range from low-risk, passive, and institutionalized acts to high-risk, active, and unconventional behaviors” (Corning & Myers, 2002, p. 704). These behaviors are employed by activists engaged in organizing work, and Holeman (2007) notes that this statement provides a functional definition of an activist.

Social and Societal Conditions that Lead to Activism’s Development

Activism exists as a phenomenon due to processes of mobilization around goals and resource needs, and this process is strengthened through the construction of a collective activist identity attached to social movements (Valocchi, 2012). While developing this identity, many activists display personality traits that indicate they are highly motivated individuals invested in finding existential meaning while working for social change (Pines, 1994). This search for meaning involves learning via consciousness-raising, personal growth, development of new rituals, and the likelihood of seeking mentorship from social movement leaders (Holeman, 2007). The processes of contending for resources and generating ideas are further solidified by a more fundamental process in activism: the development of relational ties between participants, discursive negotiations of many intersecting facets of activist’s experience, network formation, and culture formation (Mische, 2003).

Activism also emerges as a result of the conditions being favorable for contentious political discourse and action (Gould, 2009; Rutland, 2013). Rutland (2013) terms these conditions political opportunities, noting that though grievances with systemic societal problems are universal within the impulse to engage in activism, activism functions as a result of collective action to resolve the grievances. McAdams terms this the “opportunity structure” as the conditions necessary to evolve grievances into action: “(1) the relative openness or closure of the formal political system; (2) the stability or instability of the broad set of elite alignments that most emphatically shape a polity; (3) the degree to which activists are able to secure elite-level allies; and (4) the state’s capacity and propensity for repression of oppositional tendencies” (as cited in Rutland, 2013, p. 992).

Gould (2009) frames these opportunities as political horizons, in that the work of activists pushes the boundaries of acceptable affects and possibilities for relationships to political processes. These processes create social change by creating the possibility for others to feel, behave, and relate to society in ways that were previously restricted or not allowed (Gould, 2009). Gould (2009) assesses themes that emerge in the course of the emergence and decline of AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) as a direct-action-oriented activist group that pushed for radical, expedited action to address the AIDS Crisis when institutional forces stalled the development of treatments for HIV/AIDS. Gould (2009) details that the said political horizon for such bold activism emerged due to a socially and fiscally conservative turn in U.S. politics combined with homophobia and stigmas against people who are injection drug users. ACT UP pushed an agenda that expedited policy and medication approvals to treat HIV and AIDS (Gould, 2009).

Activists’ Affective Experiences

Internally, ACT UP's political frontiers were presented as electrifying and liberating for members, with participants seeing ways to empower themselves and demand ways to reduce suffering and death (Gould, 2009). The electrifying energy is reflective of the momentum that moves grievance into action. With over 300 syndicates nationally, the ACT UP coalition demonstrated the emergence of queer activism whose affects could not be experienced fully in other realms. That is to say, in society at large in the 1980s and early 1990s, LGBTQ activists felt isolated and at threat of repression and violence, whereas in ACT UP the experience of finding common ground with others in the movement served as an empowering experience for the individual and the group (Gould, 2009).

Furthermore, Gould (2009) notes how this process helped expand the sense of pride within the movement. Gould (2009) details that in the early, momentum-building period (1987-1990), ACT UP activists were charged with an array of positive emotions, sexual liberation, dynamic discourses that generated great ideas, creativity in action and protest, and anger/rage, aiding activists to experience liberating affects they rarely accessed in other endeavors.

Polletta & Jasper (2001) discuss that the social force that undergirds mobilization such as ACT UP's is the valued status of collective identity, a sense of loyalty amongst other collective group members that helps develop a sense of shared community which can embolden activists. For instance, ACT UP's framing of its messages and its energy helped model that activism is an important facet of a gay and lesbian identity (Polletta & Jasper, 2001).

Even after movements such as ACT UP decline (Gould, 2009), the identities and norms forged provide a history that provides models for activists to draw on in subsequent social movements, even if there are periods of relatively low activity between movements (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Gould (2009) notes that the sense of possibility that ACT UP infused into the

political horizons of the 1990s created a legacy for how people can respond to “subtle and not-so-subtle power relations that pervade our lives” (p. 443): an awareness that countering such power relations elicit reasonably strong emotions, including shame when facing criticism, but also exhilaration and anxiety that can mobilize activists to “assert that the way things are is not necessarily natural or the way they must or should be” (pp. 443-444).

The net effect of these phenomena is that activists since the 1990s have a working model of a bold coalition on a national scale that responded to a “constricted” social phenomenon – the complacency that allowed thousands to die of AIDS-related complications – and utilize collective affective states to “extend [political imaginaries] in unexpected directions” (Gould, 2009, p. 443). That is to say, when power structures encouraged the general population to utilize shame and fear to prevent advocacy for lifesaving HIV/AIDS treatment and destigmatization of gay and lesbian identities, ACT UP created other possibilities (Gould, 2009). These opportunities relied on affects that were “exhilarating, fun, scary, [and] anxiety-producing” to create ultimately lifesaving possibilities as its activists’ work served to break through “sizable cracks in people’s apparent complacency and indicate a conviction among participants that social arrangements are neither inevitable nor immutable” (Gould, 2009, pp. 443-444).

Activists’ Personality Traits and Identity Development

With opportunities that arise for activism, what types of people are activists? Curtin et al. (2010) conducted research on personality traits that predispose a person to engaging in activism, and found that activists tend to rate high on openness to experience and personal political salience. Omoto et al. (2010) also found that personality traits strongly correlated with those involved in AIDS Service Organizations included emotional stability, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. Other-focused motivation, including the willingness to personalize the

significance of injustices with which one does not have personal connection, serve as a predictive factor that motivates people with these personality types to engage in action (Curtin et al., 2010; Omoto et al., 2010).

Identity development functions as a core component of the practice of activism (Corrigall-Brown, 2012; Holeman, 2007; Horwitz, 1996). Identity emerges as a strong finding in Horwitz's (1996) study on common life experiences among environmental activists: the development of environmental ethics emerged as a central theme amongst the environmentalist's lives, with developing practices and ideology emerging as a pervasive, essential part of their identities. Furthermore, the practice of developing an environmentalist identity is intertwined with the idea of generativity, or the idea that one's actions impact the conditions and lives of future generations (Horwitz, 1996). Further research on the connection between environmental activist identity and generativity found that the two were positively correlated to a greater degree when mediated by one's global identity maturity (Matsuba et al., 2012). Corrigall-Brown (2012) notes that when one adopts an activist identity, it generally operates as a salient identity marker. As well, the chief predictors that one will define themselves as an activist are leftist ideology and previous activist experience, and the adoption of the identity can consequentially lead activists to spend more time in a SMO or become less likely to disengage from activism permanently (Corrigall-Brown, 2012). As well, an activist identity maintains salience throughout an activist's lifespan: core members of student activist groups in the 1960s displayed unanimous continued political involvement by being active in political parties, contributing to issue-oriented social justice organizations, and maintaining stronger recall of their involvement than their supporters, indicating the maintenance of their activism as a salient piece of their identity (Williford & Perrucci, 2009).

Motivating Factors for Participation in SMOs

Activists tend to participate in social movement organizations (SMOs) for a variety of reasons: economic needs, acting on personal values such as social justice, and a way to socialize with others (Collom, 2011; Gomes, 1992; Valocchi, 2012). Despite perceived prioritization of work over relationships, activists tend to report that satisfying relationships with colleagues within groups is the reward that most sustains their work (Gomes, 1992). It follows that the relational aspects of activism and social movements are as paramount of a concern as the SMO's goals. For those whose primary motivations are based on an organization's mission, it follows that relationship-building is a beneficial secondary gain to participation in a SMO.

In much the same vein as other organizational social phenomena, activism tends to require a supportive environment for its individual actors to thrive and find meaning in their action (Gomes, 1992; Pines, 1994). If the SMO's goals are clear within the work and the activist finds their work meaningful, activists are generally capable of tolerating high levels of stress to find existential meaning (Gomes, 1992).

Benefits of Activism

Participation in organizations that foster a sense of community can increase the group members' sense of empowerment (Gilster, 2012; Hughey et al., 2008). Valocchi (2012) has found that activists find meaning in their work through different frameworks based on their class: middle-class activists relate to activism as if it were a career; working-class activists, a calling; and low-income activists, as a way of life. As such, activists can find empowerment through varying means: finding satisfaction in the quality of their performance, finding meaning in their work, or gaining a sense of mastery or control over a community's resources (Gilster, 2012;

Valocchi, 2012). This range in activism's benefits offers a variety of protective factors against distress given the conflict-oriented nature of activist work and awareness of oppression within communities and society (Gomes, 1992; Pines, 1994).

Risks of Activism

While activism offers a variety of benefits, the literature also reveals a complex array of stressors and stressful psychological processes that are associated with activism. Given the structure of activism as a conflict-oriented process with heightened awareness of social problems, activists expose themselves to a variety of risks (Gomes, 1992; Pines, 1994). The work itself promotes the idea of social change, but at the risk of creating negative affectional relationships with social networks, families, communities, and institutions (Dave, 2012; Klandermans, 2009; Svirsky, 2010). Holeman (2007) notes that novice activists tend to experience growing pains such as stridency and confrontation with pre-existing friends and family members, highlighting a source of potential distress. Over time, activists tend to prioritize effective communication with others over confrontational dialogues laden with evangelical fervor (Holeman, 2007), indicating that the rewards of collaboration outweigh the costs of stridency. Entering movements, activists typically encounter strong rhetoric and moral outrage that mobilize group members into action (Jasper, 2011). Group members tend to experience anxiety as the emotion that guides them to mobilize; however, if mobilization is not effected, activists cannot sustain arousal and momentum, placing them at risk for depression and the movement at risk of decline (Jasper, 2011).

In a study of the affectional ties that occurred within the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and its militant faction, the Weathermen, Klatch (2004) found that as the group

size increased from 2,000 in 1962 to over 10,000 in 1965, positive affectional ties such as intimacy and solidarity diminished. As political turmoil and the intensity of the Vietnam War increased, SDS members recall more rigorous demands that they give their identities and selves to the movement, reinforced by in-group pressure to dress, act, and speak in certain manners that ran counter to mainstream norms (Klatch, 2004). Klatch (2004) observes that a group's rapid growth tends to erode positive attachments among members, indicating that activists expose themselves to the risks of divisive bonds based on guilt, judgment, pressure toward conformity, and possible loss of a sense of self. These pressures are associated with group leaders' messages encouraging members to limit ties to people outside the group (Jasper, 2011), increasing the risk of distress as activists are influenced to weaken or cut off ties from their natural supports.

While there are trends of activists' loss of sense of self under the influence of leaders, many activists have less severe impacts on their personality: activists may experience personal change and growth (Holeman, 2007; Omoto et al., 2010), and as a result may develop a new political identity (Omoto et al., 2010). In contrast to losing oneself to the movement, others may experience rewards from participation in groups and increased confidence as a result of their new identity.

SMOs that are negative emotional environments signify the movement's decline and demobilization, exposing activists to disaffected states such as alienation and desire to exit the movement (Klatch, 2004). Many former activists report that receiving disapproving affect from social networks such as their families or co-workers created cognitive dissonance that led them to stop participation in SMOs (Klandermans, 2009). Gould (2009) notes that underlying nature of shame, which was associated with popular viewpoints of radical action and stigmas thrust upon people who are gays and lesbians, was easily suppressed due to the appeal of experiencing

charged, positive affects in ACT UP's formative years. When the veneer of excitement was worn into a period of in-fighting and factionalism, shame-based affects and discourses emerged and set the tone for its period of decline in 1992-1995 (Gould, 2009).

Abeyance, or shifting (between active involvement and non-involvement; moving between SMOs), is also a common phenomenon amongst activists (Corrigall-Brown, 2012; Klandermans, 2009; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). In fact, it is the most common behavior associated with how activists respond to stressors within the movement, life changes, and movement decline: 40% of activists participate in this manner throughout their life cycle (Corrigall-Brown, 2012). As well, abeyance structures are so prevalent given that they correlate with biographical availability, or the structures of one's life (such as economic status, marital/relationship status, or whether one is a parent) that contribute to greater ease to participate in voluntary organizational work (Corrigall-Brown, 2012).

Frustration with the process of activism serves as a source for an activist's personal and relational problems (Gomes, 1992; Gousse-Lesard et al., 2013; Klandermans, 2009; Pines, 1994). As an opposing feature of activist work that facilitates satisfaction and meaning, those organizing in unsupportive environments such as SMOs with infighting, and those who sense a lack of efficacy are at risk of experiencing distress and potential burnout (Gomes, 1992; Pines, 1994). Perfectionism and rigidity in reaction to goals and ideology also function as pre-cursors to an activist's experience of negative emotions as the social movement's process unfolds (Gousse-Lesard et al., 2013; Valocchi, 2012).

Activists rate their highest risks as frustration for reasons such as public disinterest in their campaigns or infighting and factionalism within their groups (Gomes, 1992). Likewise, frustration and disappointment can arise from public apathy, lack of progress toward goals, and

feeling overextended instead of invigorated by the work (Gomes, 1992). Activists who are highly invested in successful goal outcomes are at higher risk for exhaustion than those who are willing to accept a range of outcomes (Gousse-Lesard et al., 2013). Gousse-Lesard et al. (2013) note that radicalism arises out of an obsessive passion to see a specific end result, creating a risk for the radical activist to engage in extreme behaviors to attain their goals. For activists whose identities face marginalization and oppression such as queer student activists of color, activists are organizing around issues salient to their sociocultural locations, experiencing further stress and fatigue due to the proximity of their cause to the lived experience (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011).

The Process of Radicalization within Social Movements

Kirby (2011) provides a case study of a radical social movement through a review of the Black Panther Party's work as a radical self-defense organization with multiple goals: its overarching end goal was revolution to end inequality and oppression, while its day-to-day operations helped build its base of support through community activism in the form of its survival programs such as the Free Breakfast Program and political education. Due to the structures that held many African Americans in poverty, Kirby (2011) notes that the "context the Black Panther Party was born into" created a collective affect where "frustrated, impassioned, and restless, the group wanted to bring immediate change and justice to the Black community" (p. 30). With a specific end goal of guerrilla warfare and a restructuring of U.S. society, Black Panthers were under considerable pressure to work toward that end, and with increased state repression from 1967-1971, adapted by scaling back its previous focus on armed self-defense (Kirby, 2011). After which point, activists reformed the movement to promote social change at the community level in the form of its social programs, which included the "Free Breakfast for Children Program, free health clinics, Liberation Schools, and legal aid seminars, all of which

were designed to underline the injustices of American capitalism” (Kirby, 2011, p. 26). This case study indicates the high stakes that radicals place on high stakes outcomes, and the utility of mediating strategies that help them cope with repressive pressures.

Clough (2012) discusses the affects that emerge in another form of radical activism – anarchist organizing – through an examination of themes associated with writing on actions outside the 2008 Republican National Convention coordinated by the Republican National Convention Welcoming Committee (RNC WC). This convergence of activists followed the organizational strategy of developing affinity, the collective sense of trust in working toward a common goal (Clough, 2012). In affinity, activists may experience joy and inspiration, in this case study as seen in the motivation for hundreds of anarchists to mobilize at the convention in St. Paul, Minnesota (Clough, 2012). In the action itself, activists can mobilize feelings of rage and anger to develop a mass sense of rebellion against the power structures inside the convention, and following a police raid on organizers tipped off by *agent provocateur* Brandon Darby, activists responded with fear and sadness (Clough, 2012). With the anti-establishment orientation of this radical subculture, individual actors work toward the ground-level goal of disrupting the RNC, the higher-level goal of working against the State, and in working toward such idealistic goals, expose themselves to a range of extreme affects: extreme positive affect in the form of joy and extreme negative in the form of rage and likely traumatic anxieties when exposed to a police raid (Clough, 2012).

Activism and Marginalized Identities

Activists who occupy marginal ideological spaces such as political prisoners in Turkey and South Africa displayed higher rates of psychological distress than the general population

(Başoğlu et al., 1997; Kagee, 2005). Kagee (2005) found no significantly elevated rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder amongst former political detainees, and found that other life factors mediated the severity of trauma reactions, including former detainees' focus on meeting basic needs due to low socioeconomic status, family concerns, and a desire not to think about traumatic memories. As well, Başoğlu et al.'s (1997) research indicate that activists experienced psychological preparedness for the possibility of torture while mobilizing for political action, and that when imprisoned, this preparedness correlated with reduced their levels of subjective distress compared to non-activists. Though distress may be mediated by various factors, activists remain at risk for distress as an associated factor in their involvement.

Daly (2010) discusses the structure of young women in activist cultures within Egypt, notably utilizing an intersectional lens to drawing a central theme that cross-competing pressures for activists in oppressed populations can lead to increased anxiety in the work. Daly (2010) notes that young women activists in Egypt face heightened anxiety for a variety of reasons:

1. They are within the demographic "youth bulge" that faces high unemployment and thus lowered access to resources within the society.
2. They are situated within an activist culture that does not intersect with work done by non-governmental organizations that are more strictly controlled by repressive state practices, thus as many women activists perform their work in NGOs, mainstream activists tend to exert pressure that their work is "selling out."
3. Many international activists invalidate their work due to the spurious assumption that Muslim women are universally oppressed and cannot perform empowering work, inspiring activists who are Muslim women to justify their work to a greater degree.

4. Associatedly, standards for feminist activism are set by Western standards that can on a cultural level operate with a formidable amount of cognitive dissonance.

Daly's (2010) analysis reinforces that people who occupy marginalized identities, when called to activism, can experience increased distress due to their sociocultural location. Daly's (2010) work illustrates that, though mainstream Western activist frameworks may lead to invalidating statements about their work, these women have mobilized in response to the anxiety associated with being a young woman in Egypt. They have sustained their work to deconstruct limits placed on women's roles and lives through organizations and tactics that were marginally safe within a society where activism comes with risks to one's safety (Daly, 2010). These approaches illustrate the political realities that are circumscribed by differing sociopolitical contexts, in line with the intersectional analyses that third-wave feminisms utilize to understand the complex interrelations of race, gender, class, and other sociocultural locations (Showden, 2009).

Activist Burnout

The nature of the risks activists face suggests activists can endure considerable stress, but with considerable costs. Vaccaro & Mena's (2011) research on queer student activists of color found themes of burnout, compassion fatigue, and suicidal ideation emerge due to the activist's giving more to the work than they received as benefits from it. Burnout specific to activists is discussed in the literature (Gomes, 1992; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Pines, 1994; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Burnout is defined as a physiological state in response to stressful environments with such symptoms as exhaustion, depersonalization, emotional detachment, helplessness, and reduced personal accomplishment (Cox, Kuk, & Leiter, 1993). Activists often develop a sense

of failure when not achieving goals (Pines, 1994), and report that frustration arises as a result of not feeling as if their work is accomplishing goals (Gomes, 1992). Given that idealism and ideology is attributed as a source of engaging in activism (Gousse-Lesard et al., 2013; Pines, 1994), and burnout is associated with the sense of failure toward those ideals (Pines, 1994), this dissonant state can create exhaustion and distress that could require support to resolve as an issue.

Psychotherapy as a Resource for Activists

Psychotherapy can be a useful tool in treating and making sense of pressures activists face such as performance anxiety, conflict, and burnout. Reasons why people access psychotherapy are varied: interpersonal problems, preoccupation with relationships, and need for approval were also prevalent concerns for those in psychotherapy (Göstas, Wiberg, Engstrom, & Kjellin, 2012; Horowitz, 1979). Horowitz (1979) categorized the interpersonal problems that influence people to seek psychotherapy as interdependent themes of problem behaviors: aggression, compliance, independence, and sociability.

Kalis, Harris, Prestwood & Freeman (1961) identified four common precipitating stressors for people receiving psychiatric treatment: object loss or threat of object loss; disappointment in treatment at another facility; disruption to one's psychic equilibrium; and overwhelming impulses in response to changes in stimuli.

As Gomes (1992) identifies, conflict and problems within relationships in activist work are some of the greatest concerns. If relationships, one's sense of meaning, and managing one's relationships are strong concerns for anyone accessing psychotherapy, it is by extension that

therapy can function as a useful resource given the relational concerns of activists (American Psychological Association, 2013; Gomes, 1992; Wampold, 2007).

It seems likely with exposure to burnout-inducing environments, activists are likely to experience depression or anxiety. While discussion of frustration and burnout is present in the literature (Gomes, 1992; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Pines, 1994; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011), neither qualify as psychiatric disorders (American Psychological Association, 2000). Though Jasper (2011) alludes to the collective experience of anxiety in SMOs and the potential for depression resulting from expending emotional energy in social movements, he does not discuss the specific effects of these emotions and moods on individuals within social movements. There seems to be a gap in the literature in terms of discussing what the specific symptoms and psychological disorders are that activists experience.

While individuals may experience distressing symptoms and relational problems, only a certain amount of individuals may seek psychiatric care for mental health concerns that arise. With the general population experiencing at a rate of 20% depression or anxiety, Roness, Mykletun, and Dahl (2005) found that a clear minority of those people (13-39% based on their diagnoses) access mental health care. One would by extension presume that a significant amount of any community who could benefit from mental health care do not access it, and by extension, many activists may struggle with mental health issues while organizing but do not seek treatment. The researcher hypothesizes activists are at risk of reinforcing or worsening mental health concerns if they arise in reaction to stressful SMO contexts. There is additional risk of these concerns affecting friends and colleagues within SMOs given the group phenomenon of network rippling of emotion, wherein a contagion effect of anxiety and fear can spread

throughout social networks (Westaby, 2012). As a result, the activist and possibly the SMO may operate at reduced capacity to effect social change.

While the activist may experience empowerment, an increased sense of meaning and social benefits from activism conducted in a supportive environment, many activists face emotional and affective risks in their work given the potential for unmet goals, unclear goals, conflict, disappointment, frustration, and burnout. As a result, psychotherapy can be a useful resource in understanding the impact of such risks on the activist and helping them understand what changes can help them reduce distress and increase their capacity. Perhaps the activist seeking therapy can benefit from reframing a foundation of obsessive, perfectionist passion that demands success into a harmonious passion that can tolerate and accept the inevitable disappointments that complement successes in their work (Gousse-Lesard et al., 2013).

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Research Purpose and Design

This exploratory study utilized qualitative research methodology in the form of interviews to identify reasons activists seek psychotherapy. Elements from phenomenological research were used to interpret responses to research questions.

The Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Board approved this research design on January 21, 2014 (Appendix A).

Operational Definitions.

To operationalize the variables, an activist is a person whose personal ethics influence participation in social movement organizations (SMOs) that influence institutional structural change that empowers people to maximize their access to resources (Dave, 2012; Gilster, 2012; Jasper, 1997; Jasper, 2011; Svirsky, 2010).

Svirsky (2010) discusses that activism functions as a social behavior to expand possibilities of experience and political discourse, while Dave (2012) discusses that the nature of these behaviors function as a means to reframe what is taboo and create new frontiers of acceptable social behavior. Gilster (2012) discusses the nature of activism as a means to restructure societal structures, and Jasper (1997; 2011) denotes the importance of emotions as a catalyzing force that helps an activist gain a sense of meaning and purpose to develop an activist identity and fuel collective action that promotes empowerment. The convergence of ethics,

observation of societal structures incongruent with ethics, and the collectivization of concern and effort to create empowering structures creates activism as a phenomenon.

Activists operate within a collective identity, as an activist's vision of social justice and affiliation with a SMO are dependent upon collaborating with others (Corning, 2002; Jasper, 1997). A social movement is defined as a "set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure" and a social movement organization is defined as a "complex, or formal, organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement ... and attempts to implement those goals" (McCarthy & Zald, 2009, pp. 196-197).

These sources convey the importance of activism as a meaning-making and meaning-shifting process involving individuals and groups, with aspirations for social change forming through belief systems on a collective basis. As activism is conducted through social movements, and social movements are fostered by organizations and their cultures, it is important to acknowledge that the process of being an activist is dependent on collaborative, collective effort across social networks.

Psychotherapy is participation in treatment for psychological disorders in the form of talk therapy. Psychotherapy must be provided by a clinician licensed as a Clinical Social Worker, Clinical Psychologist, PsyD (Doctor of Psychology), Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Psychiatrist, or a student intern in these fields.

Due to burnout, an end of the course of treatment, or a variety of other factors, potential participants were able to be on hiatus from working with an SMO or a psychotherapist while still

qualifying for the study. Participants must have participated in both activism and psychotherapy within two years of the interview date.

Sampling

This study drew from the population of activists who seek psychotherapy.

The researcher received approval from the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee to begin recruitment and data collection on January 21, 2014 (Appendix A).

Participants were recruited utilizing non-probability purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling. The study design required that participants live in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the city where the researcher lives, so as to draw richer data that would emerge from participants who may have distinct experiences of the phenomenon studied that may be associated with the city's interconnected networks of activist communities (Cornell, 2011). This study was feasible as the researcher is connected to multiple social networks of activists that include people who meet criteria for the study. While being embedded within the community that participants are drawn from is not necessary to conduct this study, it has proven advantageous in gaining richer and more complex narratives from within the community, and is a useful strategy for similar studies.

Purposive and convenience sampling were associated with the researcher's initial waves of outreach to recruit participants. The researcher initially sent an e-mail and a Facebook message to most of his contacts in Philadelphia on February 2, 2014. The researcher also placed a digital version of his flyer on Facebook on that date (Appendix G). The researcher followed-up with more online recruitment by sending an e-mail to the listserv of an organization with

which he is involved on February 9, 2014. This e-mail also included a link to his flyer posted on Facebook.

The researcher relied on snowball sampling by asking recipients of his message to forward the e-mail to others and/or post his flyer on their Facebook pages. The researcher also mentioned the research study at a committee meeting of an organization with which he works, encouraging other attendees to forward his recruitment message to their contacts. The researcher also met with a contact to discuss the nature of the study and discuss with her who of her contacts she would be willing to forward the recruitment announcement to. The researcher posted flyers at a variety of locations in the city where people who'd qualify for the study may frequent, and these places included a food co-operative, a punk-oriented coffee shop, an anarchist community center, an anarchist bookstore, and a large public park. These locations were informed by the researcher's knowledge of the community.

The researcher recruited 13 participants and included 12 of them in the study, and participants were asked to fill out a demographics questionnaire after the interview (Appendix C). Participants were informed they do not have to answer each question.

The study was open to adults aged 18 or older. The participants ranged in age from 24-35, with a mean age of 28.83.

Table 1. Age Ranges of Participants

Age Range	Number of Participants	Percentage of Sample
20-24	1	8.33%

25-29	6	50%
30-34	4	33.33%
35-39	1	8.33%

The participants represent a variety of sociocultural locations. The open-ended nature of the questions elicited each participant's self-determined description of their various identities.

The participants are as follows:

Participant 1: Identifies as trans*, White with non-hispanic ethnicity, middle class, and queer.

Participant 2: Identifies as a woman/genderqueer, White, upper middle class, and queer.

Participant 3: Identifies as a woman; White; Jewish; from an upper middle class family, [and my] income is now working class; and queer.

Participant 4: Identifies as female, White, European-American, middle class, and straight.

Participant 5: Identifies as a transwoman in terms of gender identity, with her gender expression as genderqueer; White, with Irish and Italian ethnicity; working class; and queer.

Participant 6: Identifies as a man; White; working class, [and] precariously employed; and in terms of his sexuality, open, but typically hetero.

Participant 7: Identifies as a femme; White, with Ashkenazi Jew as her ethnicity; wealthy, class privileged; and queer.

Participant 9: Identifies as male, White, working class, and queer.

Participant 10: Identifies as a woman; White, with Italian as her ethnicity; mixed class; and queer.

Participant 11: Identifies as female (cisgender); White, with Scotch-Irish/Ashkenazi Jewish ethnicities; not wealthy now, but from an upper-middle class background and still carrying a lot of markers and privilege from that; and more or less straight.

Participant 12: Identifies as trans, White, Jewish, and queer.

Participant 13: Identifies as genderqueer, White, working class, and queer.

Participants also were also asked to identify their disability status.

Table 2. Disability Status.

Disability Status	Number of Participants	Percentage of Sample
Yes	1	8.33%
No	10	83%
Prefer Not to Answer	1	8.33%

Data Collection

The researcher conducted an exploratory study utilizing interviews to gather data regarding reasons why activists access psychotherapy. The researcher recruited 13 participants

with whom he conducted interviews ranging from 40-120 minutes in length. The researcher and participants discussed the nature of participants' activist work, what factors led participants to seek psychotherapy, and whether participants identify a connection between their activist work and their work in therapy.

The researcher conducted interviews from February 9, 2014 to April 5, 2014. The researcher removed one participant's data from the study due to a conflict of interest, and included the data from twelve participants in the study.

The researcher designed the research questions and a semi-structured interview guide in consultation with his research advisor, Danna Bodenheimer, DSW, LCSW.

The researcher met participants at locations convenient to them. The researcher provided a brief introduction to the study and attained informed consent (Appendix B). The provider and participants signed informed two consent forms apiece, and participants retained a copy of their forms.

The interviews were semi-structured, and the researcher utilized an interview guide with open-ended questions (Appendix H). The researcher asked relevant clarifying questions to explore topics that arose with participants to create an informal atmosphere and foster a sense of connection with participants. The researcher constantly compared newly collected data to support reliability, validity, and reflexivity. The researcher updated the interview guide depending on relevant conversation topics that arise during interviews (Appendix H). The interview guide in Appendix H reflects the final version that included two questions added in addition to the Interview Guide submitted with his HSR Application: "What is your preferred

gender pronoun?” and “What do you do to take care of yourself?” or “What do you do for self-care?”

The researcher recorded the data on a digital recording device. The research transferred these data to his computer and stored the audio files on his hard drive and an external hard drive, password-protecting each file.

Participants filled out a Demographics Questionnaire (Appendix C) after their interviews. The questionnaires are filed in a locked filing cabinet with participants’ Informed Consent forms (Appendix B).

The researcher did not compensate participants for their participation in the study, as this aligned with community norms of voluntary mutual aid in that non-capital resources were shared, as in the researcher provided space for participants’ reflections on their identities and experiences and participants’ provided rich narratives for the study. Out of an orientation of mutuality, the researcher thanked each participant for their time and participation in the study and provided resources to each participant at the end of each interview (Appendices D & E).

The researcher minimized bias by various means. He pre-tested questions. The researcher aimed to recruit participants who represent a diversity of sociocultural locators (age, race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, disability status), so as to reduce omission of perspectives among participants. The researcher was successful at recruiting a representative sample that reflected diversity in gender, gender identity, sexuality, socioeconomic status, disability status, and ethnicity. The sample was racially all-White and was fairly homogenous in terms of age. Given that activist networks in Philadelphia are racially and generationally diverse,

the sample was not representative in those regards. Future research would include more extensive outreach to recruit activists of color, people who are middle-aged, and elders.

The researcher will securely store the data for an audit trail for a minimum of 3 years. Electronic data are securely stored electronically with password protection. Paper files (informed consent forms, demographics questionnaires, and coded transcripts) are filed in a locked cabinet. The researcher has kept and will keep participants' identifying information confidential.

Data Analysis

The researcher utilized quantitative data analysis to analyze some of the demographics data, as seen in the Sample section of this chapter.

The researcher analyzed the remainder of the data using phenomenological approaches to understand the essential features of activists' decisions to seek psychotherapy (Langdrige, 2007; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The researcher kept field notes for these interviews, which were informal in nature, and reflected the researcher's thoughts and impressions that occurred at the time of the interview. These notes are stored in the researcher's locked cabinet and will be retained for a minimum of 3 years. The researcher ultimately did not utilize the notes to assist with data analysis as he refined his impressions and understanding of the themes present in the interviews while transcribing and coding.

The researcher transcribed the data. The researcher interpreted the data by identifying themes through open coding. The researcher will assess for broader themes using axial coding. The researcher coded each paragraph of the interview with detailed codes descriptive of the

experience described. The researcher then collapsed detailed themes into approximately 50 general themes. Several themes were close enough in nature to collapse into one theme.

The researcher sorted the data into each theme category, and evaluated the findings in the Findings and Discussion sections.

In accordance with phenomenological procedures, the researcher aimed to find the essence associated with the phenomenon of activists' decisions to seek psychotherapy (Langdrige, 2007; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). To ascertain the phenomenon's essence during the coding process, the researcher will identify and label themes as "meaning units," synthesizing observation of common meaning units across the participants' reported experiences to identify common factors that contribute to an activist's decision to seek psychotherapy (Langdrige, 2007).

Potential Bias

Sampling bias may occur due to reliance on social networks and activist groups that comprise of 50-75% people who are white and raised middle-class. Nonetheless, the study was capable of reflecting the nature of intersectional identities in participants' lives while living in this city, which emerged as a theme amongst participants as the researcher recruited people who are queer, transgender or gender non-conforming, Jewish, diverse in terms of class status, and disabled.

As much of the early recruitment process involved Internet-based recruitment, the researcher aimed to minimize the study's exclusion of people who do not use the Internet, particularly people who are poor and/or elders. The researcher posted flyers at various locations

listed in the Sampling section of this chapter, spoke at one meeting, and met face-to-face with a person who was willing to help recruit participants.

To protect child and prisoner populations, the study did not include those populations. Tying in intersections with the concerns of those populations, the researcher conducted interviews with people who have worked to empower prisoners and those affected by mass incarceration and one activist whose work supports parents in social movements through her involvement with a volunteer collective providing free childcare at activist meetings and events.

The researcher interviewed the first 13 participants who responded to his recruitment message, contacted him based on interest in the posted flyers, or were referred to him by friends who were aware of the study.

The participants' senses of autonomy were respected as they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time during the interview or until May 20, 2014.

This study aimed to ensure research ethics through various means. The researcher obtained informed consent in dialogue and in writing before conducting interviews. The researcher has ensured and will ensure that identifying information is kept confidential by protecting electronic files with passwords, assigning participants numbers to anonymize their identities, and storing paper files (consent forms, transcripts, key of participants, field notes, demographics questionnaires) in a locked cabinet. Research was conducted with adults, and was not conducted on child and prisoner populations. Other vulnerable populations' prominent roles in social movements were important to include in the study: people with disabilities, socioeconomically disadvantaged populations, and educationally disadvantaged populations. These populations were sought during recruitment, and the researcher recruited a person with a

disability and people who have a variety of class identities. The researcher attempted to maintain beneficence by minimizing risk, and the researcher informed participants of the risk of psychological harm due to discussing sensitive subject matter related to their mental health histories. The researcher promoted beneficence by providing an opportunity for participants to contribute to research on their lived experiences as activists who seek psychotherapy. The researcher aimed to promote justice through the selection of participants representing as much of a cross-section of demographics as possible, as is discussed throughout this chapter.

Bias may be present in the research due to the fact that this researcher identifies as an activist who participates in SMOs in Philadelphia and as a person who identifies as queer. This may function as a strength in terms of having built rapport with participants, but sampling bias has occurred due to the participants' connections to his pre-existing social networks. Though the researcher did not know all of his participants prior to conducting the study, he was from a shared community with each of them. The researcher optimized objectivity in his research by collecting data with an open-ended questioning style and staying loyal the structured interview. Bias has occurred in favor of those with access to the Internet since most participants were recruited online with purposive and snowball sampling via e-mail and Facebook. Internet-based recruitment was not across-the-board as one participant was recruited as a result of seeing a recruitment flyer and another participant was referred by word-of-mouth to the researcher by another participant.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study include that its results are not generalizable due to the purposive nature of its sampling.

As well, since the research was conducted in one city, the findings may diverge from those that would have emerged in other cities or regions. Another limitation is that the researcher knew the communities in which participants live and associate, which created sampling bias.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Participants discussed the nature of their experiences with activism, including activist identity development; the factors that led them to seek therapy; and whether activism is a salient topic in therapy, including whether participants' therapists are supportive or validating if activism is discussed. While there are intersections that emerged between these types of experiences, which also appear in a variety of themes, these overall themes were distinct dialogues during the interviews.

A variety of themes emerged regarding processes associated with activism. These tended to have significant commonalities between participants: becoming activists while in high school or college; having transformative experiences within their work; developing largely supportive social networks through the work; having variable levels of participation in organizing; placing importance on hard work; experiencing draining pressures, including conflict; counterbalancing pressures with ways to take care of oneself; valuing collaboration; promoting intersectionality as a salient issue; experiencing a range of reactions from family systems while largely drawing support from friends and colleagues; and having concerns about burnout even if one does not burn out. Notable outlying perspectives are drawn from a participant who has potentially left activism and one who has intentionally contained their commitment to one organization to balance demands from their job.

Participants also discussed emotional and affective factors that arose in their work and which influenced decisions to seek a therapist. Participants experienced a range of stressful situations that impacted their mood and anxiety levels, with no common type of situation that

was a presenting problem. Discussing the commonalities between presenting problems is presented in the Discussion Chapter. An intriguing finding that the researcher did not anticipate was the prevalence of experiences where participants' presenting problems were eating disorders and other experiences that feature compulsive behaviors or experiential avoidance, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Activism did emerge as an important topic in therapy, with most of the ten participants who have discussed it in therapy discussing interpersonal dynamics that emerge in organizations or the nature of particularly busy times in their work. Participants have remarked there is a disconnect between the amount of thought and energy they place into activism versus how much they discuss it in therapy, but largely notice that work done in therapy does help them build and maintain their capacity for organizing.

The initial themes presented in this chapter reflect the nature of activist identity development. Themes discussing why participants sought therapy and whether there are intersections between activism and therapy are discussed later in the chapter. The format of this chapter reflects the general format of the interviews and the trajectory of the researcher's coding.

Correlation of Politicization Process with being a Student

All participants experienced a politicization process in high school or college, with nine out of 12 participants beginning activist work at those times. All participants have attended college, three have completed master's programs, and two are currently in graduate school. The researcher did not ask participants to identify any ideological frameworks they ascribe to, but several mentioned a variety of leftist and radical belief systems, including socialism, communism, anarchism, and one who aspires to being a revolutionary. Several participants

alluded to operating within radical political frameworks (aspiring to be a revolutionary, socialism, or general radical frameworks). Eleven out of twelve participants live in one specific neighborhood that has historical roots of strong activist communities, and ten out of twelve participants identify as queer, an identity that often intersects with radicalism.

Four participants' families of origin were involved in political or religious organizations, creating an atmosphere that served as an incubator for their politicization. Two participants remarked that their mothers' involvement in the Democratic Party was influential in their politicization, with one remarking:

I grew up with like my mom and my family was pretty engaged, mostly like, "We love the Democratic Party! And we believe in voting for people and doing voter outreach." But my mom also did volunteer with different organizations when I was a kid, so I feel like I just kind of grew up with that and then when I was in college, I like met a bunch of radical anarchist people and then it became a huge part of my identity at that point where I was just like, "Okay, I'm an activist and like all my friends and I are activists and we go to protests together, organized against our dining hall's bad policies or whatever," things like that.

Another participant remarked that commitment to social justice advanced in the Roman Catholic Church motivated her politicization process: "there'[re] a lot of bad things about Catholicism, ... and I'm not practicing anymore, but I feel like it does give you a sense of the importance of like social justice and trying to right inequality in the world." Another participant's church connected her to volunteer work that began her politicization process:

I started getting political like in high school and ... through my church that I was involved in, I thought a lot about mission work and service work as a part of the church,

so I often helped out with different sorts of economic justice social service work ... mostly feminist stuff, and later more like anti-racist feminist stuff.

Her experience doing such service work connected her to practices that helped deepen the thought she gave to what factors led to the conditions she saw.

[I] started to get just really angry about the world... why am I serving like at church just to homeless folks on Sundays ... at first it was just like this fun activity I did with my friends from church, ... and then I started being like, “Why is this happening?! Why are there people that don’t have food?”

One participant’s service-learning program at her high school connected her to volunteer work that inspired similar questions about the systemic nature of poverty and oppression in the U.S.

I decided to do my senior project around [work at a soup kitchen] and then kind of all of these questions came up through that work, which was [surrounded] meeting people’s basic needs around food ... and it was a really kind of transformative situation for me at the time, but it really kind of was just the beginning and an entry point into a lot of big sort of political questions really surfacing for me at the time, ... asking ... why is there this massive disparity in wealth and why do so many people have so little and some people have so much?

This participant went to college within the next year and “got politicized and radicalized pretty quickly” where “committing your life to political work became something that people sort of seemed to be doing around me,” influencing her involvement in anti-war and labor organizing throughout her career as a campus activist.

Another participant found that developing a punk identity alongside her politicization in high school served to “get [her] in the door” with involvement in college, where she applied her previously developed socialist/communist identity into involvement with a formal socialist organization and work around academic freedom at her campus.

These two examples are illustrative of the seven participants whose family system did not immediately connect them to political work or political thought, but where the atmosphere of their learning environment facilitated their politicization process. As one participant noted, “I think that I had something of a classic getting-politicized-in-college thing, so I did a lot of that student organizing when I was in undergrad particularly around queer issues and ... a living wage campaign on our campus.”

Another participant remarked that the influence of radical thought in his coursework helped him embark upon an activist career, which helped him feel he could expand his identity in a direction he found meaningful, as exhibited by joining progressive groups on campus and devoting much energy after college to organizing.

I started in college ... what initially drew me in was ... when I was a teenager, I was very much a loner, very shy, ... and I didn’t have any political leanings ... and then I had a couple radical English professors ... who introduced me to a lot of writings and thoughts about capitalism and the environment and race and gender and all that kind of stuff ... it just sort of blew my mind and it led me on this journey deeper and deeper into the rabbit hole.

Two participants reported galvanizing experiences in class dialogues and projects while college students, and this politicization process served as a foundation for their organization work after graduation.

I really got more, a little more radicalized through a class that I took in college, totally by chance ... [and] it made a lot of previous experiences sort of click into place, and that's what made this [awareness of] intersectionality and variable oppressions really click into place, for me, and that was a really galvanizing thing.

Another challenged his professor's stance on the film *Paris is Burning* (Dooley et al., 1992).

And I was beyond outraged at *Paris is Burning*¹. I was ready to just throw down ... this might be the first act of activism that I ever did ... I didn't even know where the anger was coming from, but I knew that [the portrayal of and discourse around trans people in the film] was bad and this was wrong.

At the suggestion from his professor that he write a paper on the film, he proposed he would go deeper and interview transgender people and trans sex workers in New York about their perception of the film and present his findings. He noted he "did win her respect in part if not anything else, ... [and] it was really empowering." This channeling of such energy into addressing injustices is consistent with his participation in multiple organizations since college.

One participant was deeply moved by studying and embracing feminism at her community college and later experienced a supportive community within a Women's Studies Department that fostered much activism on campus and in its surrounding town.

¹ Dooley et al., 1992.

That was when I was just reading about “the personal is political,” [and it] really connected me to wanting to do bigger work. I had the opportunity and resources to do that in college. ... I feel like it was an incredible time in my life. The professors that I had were incredibly intelligent, and ... I started off with a basic understanding of feminism, and then being a Women’s Studies major, was able to like learn about other oppressions connected to feminism, and reading incredible books ... [offered] a profound moment of understanding racism, and just having that ability to spend so much time reading and studying and talking to other people felt like such an incredible privilege slash was so meaningful to me and changed my life cause I was able to like have meaningful connections to people, do meaningful work, and the activism that I was doing, connecting it to the schoolwork that I was doing, [and I] really found family in the Women’s Studies Department.

Eleven participants approached politicization and activism from the aforementioned avenues. A notable exception to these approaches involved one participant whose work in psychotherapy while a college student inspired their politicization, particularly their therapist’s introducing them to feminism: “It was in fact therapy that got me into activism. ... I think it was in seeking therapy that I realized ‘Oh, the personal is political, you know?’” They began treatment to address an eating disorder, and they credit feminism for providing a framework to promote healing.

It was in my recovery from anorexia that I became a political being ’cause it was through discovering feminism at a very late age... It was just really eye opening to see how the to see the bigger picture, ... I hadn’t thought about these things and this woman showed them to me and ... [it] just blew my mind. ... It was through ... getting a better

understanding for all the things that happen to female-bodied people that I saw that I got the strength and courage to actually heal my eating disorder, so that when I went in to go purge, I fuckin' picked up a zine.

Rewarding and Transformative Nature of Activism

The previously mentioned participant's awe for their politicization process is indicative of a sense of deep and profound meaning that all 12 participants reflected in their narrative, indicating its importance within their life history and identity development.

One participant's experience with helping run a girls' empowerment program leaves them in awe at seeing the campers' ability to build community, work through difficult issues, process concepts about gender and non-binary genders that many adults struggle with. As a result, they say they leave the program's annual camp thinking "it's as beneficial to the volunteers as it is to the campers, to even watch volunteers, you know, leave with a different perspective, and leave with different sort of things to think about, you know to leave with different ideas to think about is an amazing process, so I don't know, the whole thing is really heartwarming and just blows my mind every year."

Another participant had a life-changing experience becoming active in Palestine Solidarity work as a Jewish person. Her experience building community while doing queer organizing led her to relationships and experiences that influenced her participation in Palestine Solidarity work, which she found deeply moving. In attending a three-day conference organized around such work, which led her to a national conference to a gathering of people who are Jewish and do Palestine Solidarity work, which "super blew [her] mind."

Another participant was so moved by his experience entering his first activist meeting that it compelled him to make organizing his life's work.

I went to that meeting and I said nothing the whole meeting, I was just sitting in awe of these student activists who were basically all older than me and they all seemed to have their shit together ..., they're way more outgoing, outspoken, ... the things that they were doing at that time were not particularly radical, but just the fact that they were doing things and that they knew how to get things done, ... they were way beyond my capacity [and] at that moment I just was looking at these people as if they were on a completely different level from me.... And then at the end of the meeting, this one woman who was ... leading the meeting turned to me ... was like "So, you know, are you gonna come back to another meeting?" And that just blew my mind, to be honest, my self-esteem had been so low by that point, ... I couldn't envision myself as being that kind of person basically and I never thought of myself as having the capacity to be like that ... for her to recognize my potential in that way, even in that very small way was a huge wake-up call.... Suddenly the possibility of me changing and becoming an activist was like apparent, and I was hooked immediately on the idea of "Wow, maybe I can actually be like these people!"

Similarly, some participants experienced inspiring and transformative experiences throughout their activist careers.

One participant noted that in attending a national conference for a national network of school and city-based groups working for student's and worker's rights, she was moved by the proposal that emerged from its women's caucus that there be a moratorium on men's voices, and

“seeing how it completely changed the rest of the conference was just amazing, so I think that since that point, that has been like a huge part of what being an activist or a revolutionary or something is to me, is that we’re trying to make institutional change and like, don’t ever forget about that.” She remarked that her work with this organization over many years was “the first group I was a part of [that] I committed my life to.”

One participant has over the past two years devoted much energy to the work of a collective organization, noting that it has helped her find satisfaction with her work while also deconstructing her social anxiety.

When I’m good at those things and on top of those things, that sort of takes away some of the anxiety, ... it’s been a way of taking back some of [the beliefs of incompetence she developed at her first job] and in the [collective organization], even though it’s not paid, it’s still a lot of work ... [and I’ve] mostly chosen to take on a lot myself, and being good at my work is really valuable to me.

This participant and four others remarked upon the importance of the socialization that occurred through their work.

One participant noted that his involvement in multiple organizations helped diminish a sense of isolation and alienation from the people around him.

[Becoming an activist] really opened up a lot of variety of opportunities just to connect with people. ...and I didn’t have to keep quiet about the things I care about, I can be like, “Hey, this is an issue that matters and let’s talk about,” ... [Activism] improved [my quality of life] seriously, I have built a much larger social network, one of my friends he

teases me that he thinks I'm one of the most networked people he knows ... I went from being very, very, fairly socially isolated [to very connected].

One participant who has committed to various struggles remarked as follows that:

[My work] has been really liberatory, feeling a sense of community in the world that's really about interdependence and care and work and really being able to rely and depend on people and building sort of social ties on comradeship, which I think is something that isn't very traditional in our society ... basically the creation of new social relationships and how we relate to each other and I think that that's been really transformative and liberatory for me.

One participant has, due to various life changes, largely decided to leave activist work over the past year. He noted that:

I think while I was in it – you know, both/and, right? It gave my life a lot of meaning, ... it allowed me to build connections to people that I wouldn't have otherwise that were really deep and meaningful and rich connections, ... it gave me something to focus my energies on that was satisfying and rewarding at least some of the time. It also made me feel like constantly like I can't catch up with my e-mails, I can't ever like stop ... it was just non-stop.

His level of disillusionment with the constant nature of work is evident of pressures that will be addressed later in this chapter. As indicated in his noting the “both/and” nature of the arc of his involvement, multiple participants have experienced great reward that is balanced with stressful or draining experiences due to the amount of work they have done.

The Importance of Community

Nine participants commented upon the importance of community in a variety of forms: communities that they live in, communities of friends, and communities that develop through their work. Notably, community functions as an important facet of how participants can create a model for the relationships and infrastructure of a society that they desire to live in.

One participant's politicization process occurred at the same time she was finding queer community, which influenced her involvement in organizing:

It was freeing and exciting, and I'm like totally a people person and an over-joiner, and so [with] unpaid queer organizing, you can really throw yourself in and I was just going to all these meetings and going to all these readings and events and meeting all these people.

Another participant found her work significant in building a sense of community between her and those with whom she collaborates:

[The] emotional significance [of my work] is proving a deep collectivist value that I think has been sort of stamped out of a lot of us I think in our society we're really told that like people can't come together, that like you know we should just kind of live our isolated lives and sort of survive but there's all of these differences that get in the way of being able to feel power and collectivity and it was a lot of – a lot of our work [at her organization that connects multiple struggles] is at breaking the sense of isolation that I think is really prevalent in a lot of people's lives in terms of the struggles that people go through to just make ends meet and to kind of get through their days working really like

multiple jobs, long hours, not even to pay their bills, you know, where is there time for community here, [for] collectivity?

Another participant similarly found the importance of his work in transformative justice and prison abolition work to address harms done to communities as a result of mass incarceration.

[I view] prison abolition ... as not just like, “There’[re] no jails anymore, but that we don’t have the root causes of poverty and racism and sexism and transphobia that fill the jails,” that we’re addressing ... all the root causes of why people are in prisons to begin with, that’s sort of like the long-term goal is to ... [look] at the institutionalized oppression that keeps people down and doesn’t allow [people’s] full potential, doesn’t allow for folks to have family, ... all of those things that get stunted and stopped because of prisons, because of racism and cops and all of the things that are sort of happening to the communities around us, and in our communities.

One participant discussed the structure of living in a collective house with other people doing activist work, which promotes mutual sharing of resources and building community.

It’s not as easy to live collectively and have to talk about everyone’s feelings all the time and like all of the [decisions we make together such as] which kind of bananas are we gonna buy? ...It’s a lot of work, and I think that it only works if you really 100% trust that everyone else is trying as hard as they can to like have a just community both in the house and within like the wider neighborhood ... I want to know that these people ... actually care about this as much as I do.

Another participant remarked upon the importance of organizing with a volunteer peer support network for gender nonconforming people, where it was “like finding a new social circle ... and finding a political circle.”

We tried to make it as safe as a space as possible like that was our core mission was to create safe spaces for genderqueer and trans people just to talk and have a set of working agreements and ... [creating] a safe environment ... was very central to ... how I’ve furthered my involvement in activism because it was a both ... a therapeutic space and a space in which facilitation was key.

Many members of this organization formed a contingent at a major protest, where the sense of community within the contingent helped alleviate the risks of harassment and violence that its members faced there.

It was a good sense of community and safety. If you’re doing activism and you’re queer and you’re visibly trans – there are a lot of people in the group who wanted to become more involved and become more visible – but going to a protest is far more complicated when your identity is far more complicated.

Another participant remarks that most of her community she has made, by some extension, through networks forged since identifying as an activist, but that she appreciates the diversity of perspectives she receives from a wide social network that includes those who do not identify as activists.

It’s important to me to have friends and community that are really political to support me in that and it’s also important to me to have friends and community that are doing lots of

different things and not just activists... to hold me, grounded, and then [remind me that] there's many ways to live and we create some different spaces too.

Participants' Friends are Mostly Activists

Well, at this point in my life, I've really built my social relationships around my political work so most people are on board [with supporting my work]. And we're kind of in it together, and that's my main filter through which I create and construct really close relationships in my life ... and hold close people in my life who share sort of political goals and visions for their lives as well, and that's sort of a huge thing that I'm always thinking about is sort of the political vision, the political commitments being the real anchor for really lasting and long-term relationships in my life.

This participant's statement about the way her political work has helped facilitate deep relationships echoes those of eight participants who remarked their friend groups are mostly comprised of activists. A participant who joined activist groups after college and went to a college that had a highly politicized campus culture remarked that many friends from school were very supportive of his work, "I went to [a college] which tends to churn out people who care about things so most of my friends .. are activists in their own way in some way or another, [so] they're like, 'Oh great, join the party!'"

This phenomenon may also correlate with the social norms associated with the tightknit nature of intersecting activist social networks in the neighborhood in which 11 of the 12 participants live.

[My friends are] really supportive of [my work with a youth empowerment organization] ... I live in [this neighborhood], I also live in a very tiny bubble [that's a]

political world, so everyone I associate with just loves it... so I can't say I've had any pushback or negative responses.

This phenomenon proved helpful for one participant when she moved to the city in the past few years "I can trace, not everybody I know in this city, but I can trace a whole lot of people back directly or indirectly to the [collective organization]."

One participant pondered that, in terms of drawing people into movements, it may be less strategic to have one's closest friends comprised of only activists, but that it is a source of comfort to have such strong commonalities and common values with her friends.

At this point, pretty much all my friends are also activists, and I actually ... had this realization recently, ... I know this is sort of bad in terms of like movement building and bringing new people into movements, I wouldn't say it was like a hard line, but ... I'm not actually even interested in making friends who aren't part of these communities... [and] the struggle is what's important to me, and I want it to be important to the people that I'm close to.

Activist Identity Development

The idea of developing an identity as an activist, organizer, or revolutionary was resoundingly meaningful for many participants.

Coming into this identity as an organizer has really [led me to] having a sense of responsibility for making history, which is ... a huge way of thinking of yourself in the world, and I think that it's kind of rare, and it's very different than I ever really imagined, ... [there's] sort of a whole new creation of identity ... [by] coming into that

expanded sense of self of being like a creator of history and a leader and really a change maker.

This participant has experienced a “really real process” that impressed upon her that she is “leading a life that [she] wasn’t born to live.” She also credits this process and her identity development as instrumental in helping her access channels of desire and to embody her queer identity.

Ten participants spoke about the identity frameworks that they have contemplated as an activist. One spoke to the sense of embodiment she feels in having this identity:

[Activism] gives me direction and meaning and focus in my life, and I feel like I sometimes organize my life around my identity as an activist and an organizer that, when I think about my life, and I want it to be going towards something and hopefully towards making change, or at least when I start to feel hopeless about the possibility of making change, towards asking the questions ... [that] reflect my values and what I want for the world, so then for me, like, activism is ... like a major force in my life [that leaves me] really wanting to fight.

Similarly, another participant remarked:

I thought a lot about kind of becoming politicized and that process and, really, a whole new sense of self in the world and just having an expanded sense of my world ... I think most of what I sort of grew up around was really close-knit familial kinship ties, where ... a lot of people were sort of coming from a similar set of cultural experiences and reference points ... and that was my life for a long time and I think going through this process of political development has been a personal liberatory process for me because I

think it's just opened up ... so much more in terms of what's possible ... and who I am in the world.

One participant referenced the complicated nature of identifying as an activist, while also reinforcing that her aspirations to be a revolutionary functions as an important framework for how she places herself in the world.

I just read this critique the other day of people self-identifying as activists or revolutionaries, so I think it's weird water to tread, but at the same time, I'm like, "... If I wasn't an aspiring revolutionary, I don't really think I'd have much to live for." I really think that the world is extremely fucked-up and that feeling like I am a part of a group of people who believe that justice can still prevail, even though there is like no reason to believe that, is what keeps me motivated to like be alive and keep like engaging in society.

One participant remarked that their activist work is contained to one organization, and as such "I don't really know how much of an activist I truly am, let's be real, I do a lot of work with [a girls' empowerment organization] and that's sort of where it sort of ends." While this person identifies their work as activist work, this statement indicates their comparison of their work to the extensive commitments of time and effort that their neighbors and friends devote to organizing work.

Another participant noticed his not participating in organizing work over the past year leaves him "feel[ing] like a movement dropout."

I think I needed to like do something different, do things differently, and taking a minute to figure out what that means because so much of my self-image was wrapped up in

being this like hardcore super-reliable, there-for-you ... all-the-time kind of person. I think also I just wanted to do personhood differently, you know?

Participants' observations on their identity development as an activist, organizer, or aspiring revolutionary demonstrate the importance of this identity in their lives and also the evolving nature of their identity over the course of time.

Empowerment Through Movement Work

Ten participants spoke to finding the process of politicization and their activist work as empowering, with supporting evidence interspersed throughout various themes (Correlation of Politicization Process with Being a Student, Meaningful and Rewarding Nature of Being an Activist, The Importance of Community, Intersectionality). These experiences have included finding queer community, finding deep and lasting relationships, finding satisfaction in one's work with an organization, and working to uplift women's voices.

One participant spoke to how much power she felt individually and collectively when she participated in a civil disobedience action as part of her anti-prison campaign's work.

[Some] of the highs [I experience in working on the campaign are] ... when I am at a rally and I feel like I'm with my people and I feel like we're powerful, that's like an emotional high for me! ... After I got arrested as a part of a civil disobedience with [the campaign, I was] just feeling like, "I'm gonna take some risks!" That's the part [where I know] that I'm gonna fight, like, "I am ready to fight! I'm ready to take risks! I can do it! I need to not live out of my fear, but I need to live out of possibility."

This participant's passion for the work is evident in her narrative, and her commitment to radical action is furthered by her willingness to confront the risks associated with civil disobedience to act on her values. The sense of reward and empowerment is evident in her and others' willingness to enact possibilities, including acting in ways that are not normatively coded by legal standards and social norms.

Support Systems

All participants spoke to the importance of receiving and providing support as they balance all the demands in their lives. These sources of support come from social networks, organizations, and institutional settings.

One participant moved to the city intending on staying for only a few months, but has remained for over a decade. She remains friends with her ex-boyfriend whose relationship influenced her to stay in the city, and while she noticed he struggles to understand why she commits so much time and energy to her activist work, she finds him a fundamental support when issues arise in her family system and personal life. For greater common ground in terms of her activist orientation and support for projects associated with her work with a prison service organization, she reports gratefulness that she can rely on some of her earliest friendships developed while organizing in the city.

I'm still really close with a lot of the folks [from a collective organization, ... and when] I organized a fundraising event ... [they assisted with a variety of tasks and helped] me bake cookies, ... it's like for a [fundraiser], but it was so much fun, so ... that's great to have people who you can have fun with while you're doing the work.

She also notes that her closest friends are also helpful when she discloses some of her experiences with mental health issues, “I do feel supported ... in a really positive way, sometimes I still feel really overwhelmed with all the stuff I need to do, but in general, I feel really supported.” This is indicative of the reward she and other participants find in forging deep connections through their activist work, which helps reduce the sense of feeling overwhelmed.

Another participant has at periods felt overwhelmed while balancing rabbinical school, organizing, and a full social life. She is particularly responsive to sharing time with friends and has also found her spiritual direction with a rabbi at her school to be impactful in managing her multiple stressors and how they intersect.

I brought stuff to her and she is awesome and all able to handle it ... [and] I’ve definitely talked about my organizing and really gotten into kind of like emotional, spiritual, psychological impact of being an organizer and um, so sometimes it’s about group dynamics or my stuff that comes up in organizing and getting to look at that, also somewhat of just like figuring out your place in the world or the work that I’m best suited to [and] what I really believe about things.

One participant also has benefited from support from within an institutional framework. He attends a support group at a local LGBTQ center that helps build community and support with other transpeople. This person, after an insulting and offensive experience in another LGBTQ center’s trans support group, has really appreciated the atmosphere and facilitation when it is run “for trans people by trans people ” and respects that the facilitator’s perspective as a transwoman is helpful when “something could be upsetting ... she steps in earlier and faster.” He also speaks highly of the mutual support he receives and provides from other activists, which

is in contrast to reactions from friends he met prior to joining activist organizations that felt invalidating (“If you just stopped caring,” or “It doesn’t really matter”). He is appreciative of using supportive experiences as opportunities to process personal and political issues that arise, and provided a case example of setting up a dinner date with a friend who asked for support on Facebook when she was discouraged with her experiences as a medical and disability activist.

One participant is heavily involved in an anti-prison campaign that has several dozen members, hundreds (if not thousands) of supporters, accomplishes considerable work through multiple committees, and has a distinct organizational culture that encourages placing considerable energy into its work. She benefits from processing thoughts and issues that arise within the work both with a close support system of friends also involved with the campaign as well as friends outside of it.

So within [the organization], I feel like I have a support network of people that I’m friends with and also my girlfriend is in [it] too, so it’s like I feel ... support from within [the organization], ... and then [I also receive] support [from] outside of [the campaign from] my other friend groups.

One participant remarked that her housemates and her anti-authoritarian feminist political study group have been helpful in supporting each other. She commented upon the mutuality of this support in saying it is important that she has “that emotional support and having people who understand, and then also when my housemates are having issues with their organizations and things they do, ... we can talk about all these things, these dynamics.” She also spoke fondly of her study group that meets regularly to discuss political thought and strategies to take to their

respective organizations, where there is a strong sense of “our commitment to each other and to the revolution and setting specific goals for ourselves as like comrades.”

Study groups function as important space for building community and reflection on political work. One other participant spoke to the importance of her study group as a support, with the group’s focus on political work, but as a by-product of forming after their friend’s death:

I was actually in a radical theory group with a lot of his former students for a while and that was a really good healing thing. ... It wasn’t like explicitly set up as such, it was just a reading group where I had, this is how I happened to know the people.

The former participant’s study group was an example of an organization that provides considerable support from within in the form of check-ins at meetings, which three participants spoke about. In the context of this city’s organizing culture, the tradition of check-ins go deeper than many organizations’ culture of using “go-rounds” to allow attendees to briefly introduce themselves. This is done to allow members to speak about issues they face, which helps deepen the bonds between group members.

At this point that’s what’s more important to me than what we read is that we actually like the community we have in supporting each other and doing these really long check-ins where you can take ten minutes just to talk about all the shitty things that have happened to you in the last two weeks – or the really great things.

Flexible timing with check-ins is key in promoting this relational approach to organizing, as another participant noted “check-ins took hours, but often we checked-in for so long, so that we knew what was going on in each other’s lives, and that felt really, really good.”

Another participant recalls fondly a time when he scaled back the level of his organizing, and felt validated as his organization's check-in culture had modeled the acceptability of doing so.

I think my favorite [memory of a group dynamic] was ... the dynamic of “take care of yourself” and doing check-ins at every meeting and doing check-outs and capacity check-ins, “What are you able to do? What are you up for? How many hours can you put in? And no judgment on that!” So if you can't put in any hours, “Well, good, we love you and support you,” and when I took a break from [the organization], I got a card from my friends and they all were like, “We love you, we support the work you're doing. Come back whenever it feels good to you.” And it felt really genuine; it didn't feel like lip service to taking care of yourself. ... And I think that that allowed for some real honesty around capacity and real ability to not burn out and to really check in with yourself and know what you're capable of doing.

This participant modeled his own self-care strategy of doing a regular “capacity check-in with myself, ... [to] inventory ... what I am able to do” and monitor his pattern of balancing a demanding job with a high level of involvement in multiple organizations.

Self-Care

Given the stress levels that participants face as a result of their activism, professional roles, and issues from their social networks, taking care of oneself is a prominent theme that emerged as nine participants discussed strategies they use to do so. Two participants mentioned their skepticism about the discourse of self-care.

The previously mentioned participant detailed his history of involvement in organizations over the past 15 years, which began with involvement in college where he would be “having a sort of harried, anxious, stressed-out demeanor and, looking at my datebook, other people would be like ‘*Whoa! That is frightening!*’ And I’d be like, ‘What do you mean?’ So [I’d be] overbooking myself and not taking care of myself.” He remarked that at those times, he would “hear these ideas [about self-care] and think they were great, but not really know how to apply them to myself.” Over time, insight into how his patterns of involvement correlate with stress levels and avoidance of his feelings has helped alleviate this distress. In addition, therapy and “x[ing]-off some days so that I don’t book anything and I can ... connect with myself” have proven helpful as well.

All 12 participants have been in therapy within the last two years, and five mentioned it as a form of self-care.

Therapy is a really grounding force for me... just the act of being like “I’m a really busy person, and I’m going to go therapy every week and I’m going to spend an hour at therapy,” has been a really important way for me to perform self-care ... I can say that I can say I’m doing something concrete ... when I start to feel overwhelmed by different experiences.

Another person noted that she began work with her current therapist after a health flare-up that correlated with working up to 60-80 hours/week at a job that was focused on movement building. She noted that she appreciates that her therapist’s integrative approach that combines psychotherapy with reiki, energy work, and the use of flower essences, which reflect her therapist’s belief that “being in therapy is really helping people go through a shift in

consciousness.” Through this work, she has opened herself up to balancing in a variety of practices to sustain her movement work.

I had really been the person that was really not concerned with self-care at all [and] felt like it was unnecessary. ... The movement work, the organizing, that was self-care, this is what I live for, this is what has created so much possibility in my life, why would I not devote as much energy as possible to organizing, organizing, organizing? ... In the last year or two ... [my] physical health... called into question [this framework, and that] ... I don't have a choice but to really take care of myself in order to be able to continue. ...

Over the course of a year, she has begun “more spirituality work and ... meditative practice, ... [and has gone] to acupuncture on a weekly basis for help with balancing and grounding and ... coping with anxiety and ... pain management.”

One participant had a much less validating experience when discussing his movement work with his therapist. When presenting to him the variety of projects he was involved with, the therapist began discussing that these “activist activities [were] somehow like a form of self-harm and an expression of self-destruction,” which did not mirror the participant's experience, as he doesn't “particularly see being involved in community gardens and oral history projects as a very destructive process!” This is indicative of the rewarding nature of movement work that all participants remarked they experienced, and that activist work can be an important form of self-care.

While many register ideas of self-care as focused meditative, grounding, or relaxation strategies, participants have mentioned a variety of leisure activities as important. “I try and remember some things that are really important to me are turning my brain off sometimes and

watching TV,” remarked one, while another provided a comical rebuttal to the traditional discourse of how they practice self-care after arriving home from their emotionally demanding job.

Let’s be real, ... I’d love to [say] “I did yoga and I’m really mindful, I practice mindfulness, I meditate for 20 minutes a day,” nahhhh, I just drink a bottle of wine in the bathtub!

This irreverent questioning of traditional discourses around self-care was evident in three others’ remarks. Two participants registered their critiques of these discourses and remarked that they appreciate physical activity and activist work.

A lot of [therapists] have this idea that like I need ... more me-time [such that] if I spend more me-time watching Netflix and giving myself facials, I’ll feel better, and ... I think there can be a prevailing theme of “If you spend more time on yourself and being indulgent and listening to ... happy Enya music and eating cakes, you’ll be able to ... be less depressed or process trauma or feel less anxiety,” and there are a subset of people, and I’m one of them, that process things by doing, whether that doing is going on a hike or feeding the homeless, it’s a toss-up. ... I tend to get more upset and anxious if I’m like home alone listening to like baroque music and eating bon-bons.

Another participant who “likes to be really active,” said:

I find the faster I am moving, ... the more it calms me, and I really resent about self-care is makes it all about calming down and slowing down, I mean, you gotta rest sometimes, but I like to ride my bike a lot, I just came from softball practice with actually a team

that's [comprised of members of her collective, and] once the weather gets better, I'll get back into running again.

The same level of distrust about the discourse of self-care was evident in another participant's comments.

I'm sort of suspicious about the discourse of self-care, but maybe that's still my avoidance of myself, I don't know, I can't tell you that I have a self-care practice. [While I don't have] a formal critique, ... I have read very interesting critiques of self-care rhetoric that resonate with me.

Solidarity and Collaboration

All participants remarked upon the importance of collaborative work, echoing one participant's comment mentioned earlier that their work represents a "deep collectivist value that I think has been sort of stamped out of a lot of us."

When an encampment movement arose in the city, one participant was pleased that several members of a national student organization he was involved in could draw on their longstanding connections to aid in organizing the movement.

I ended up facilitating the first two mass meetings that we had, and what happened was because I had had that experience with [the national student organization], ... [people from that organization] could identify each other as like people we knew, people we trusted, and having that sort of network, we were able to make [the encampment] a lot more coherent and well-organized.

This person also expressed hesitation over the quality of connection and mobilization inherent in such movements given the history of broader and deeper channels to connect people in past eras of heightened movement activity.

I think in this era, in the U.S. ... we've had basically 40 years of de-politicization of the U.S. working class, and de-mobilization. And so ... young people today do not have ... the historical knowledge or involvement in social movements and so [starting movements is] like starting from scratch, and you also have the Internet which is now dominating the way people interact, ... and the way that the Internet interacts with social movements, I think it like makes it easier for people to connect but the connections we have are increasingly superficial.

Solidarity at protests, rallies, and actions emerged in 11 interviews. Another participant noted that members of his crew of street medics were able to march alongside people who are undocumented to promote an overall sense of safety for them at the march.

Undocumented immigrants tend to bring up a host of emotions, not all of which are welcoming emotions, and it wouldn't even necessarily be the police that'd cause a problem ... the police and [Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers] are always a concern, but even regular everyday people tend to have or can have very, very deep-seated feelings about undocumented immigrants and ... you want to be closer to the people who are at a higher risk for getting hurt, just because if we can step in as soon as they get hurt, and not have it continue to go on further, that's a safer bet for everyone.

This participant also demonstrated the importance of mutual aid between activists and those with whom they work as he participated in disaster relief work coordinated by the same movement that organized the aforementioned march.

I did mostly food prep kind of things ... [and] it was actually [like making] food for an army and it was a way to give back to the community and be really involved, it was sort of an immediate thing, there weren't questions asked, it wasn't like a "what are you doing here, why are you here" thing but like an "Okay, you're here to work, what can we help you with" [thing, and] that was really good.

Most participants expressed hopefulness for the power of connections and working collectively in movements. One participant hopes to "build models for organizing, working together, that recognizes everyone's dignity and humanity, that's about love and connection, not out of places of competition and oppression." This participant gives much thought to her work in an anti-prison campaign where outreach, internal support, and coalitional work are instrumental factors in maintaining the organization's health.

I think there's pressures for being a strong organization within itself of course, and then also being like in collaboration with other groups and answering e-mails from outside folks, and I'm on Outreach Committee, and figuring out how to reach out to more people, but also have to like keeping engaged the people that are around and coming back.

The results of their collaborative work have created multiple victories within the campaign, including a successful march that raised awareness about mass incarceration, drawing resources from within the campaign and outside, after which point this participant felt "*so proud* of all the people that helped make it possible!"

Another participant's work in a prison service organization has helped highlight her strengths at organizing systems and training new members. She particularly feels good about engaging people "who might not otherwise be engaged in the issue, maybe ... because their church group is coming to volunteer, and they get this experience that's really important." Collaboration is instrumental in promoting the organization's mission and justice for people in prison and those affected by mass incarceration, and experiences with such volunteers "is a small piece of starting that change that will hopefully change the way our society deals with breaking laws or maybe changes what is breaking the law."

One participant's work in a notable and victorious campaign around public services was enhanced by coalitional work with many groups and people across the city.

We had a multi-valent strategy around a legal strategy to actually stop the closures [of a public service] and get a court injunction against them, and we were also prepared to do a direct action ... if the closures went through, and in like the final hour in court, the judge ruled in our favor, and said the mayor didn't actually have jurisdiction to close public buildings like that and so the [public services] were saved, the campaign was a victory.

In her subsequent work, she has spent considerable time working with her comrades to connect struggles and people that are typically disconnected from one another.

[My organization is] really trying to bring people who are organizing in different sectors together to really see a larger fight and to kind of people are pitted against each other all the time, in order to build power, to bring people together in non-conventional ways and doing a lot of political education around leadership development and so early on in my time [in the organization], we actually did this tour across the city that was sort of like a

caravan, we got into multiple cars and we had students ... taxi workers ... and firefighters ... and people who had been fighting gentrification battles and housing struggles ... on this political education history tour of [the city] ... [and we saw that we were] bringing life to a lot of these places in the city through media communications but also ... getting that sense of sort of struggle and like organizing in these places that we see every day [that] are actually battlegrounds for people's rights and needs, and so that was really amazing. ... [This tour was followed by discussions about] all of our campaign goals, how are we being pitted against each other as people, and then like what are ways for us to come together and build common ground and really kind of build a unified alliance together.

One participant fondly recalls the cohesiveness of her work in an anti-imperialist Palestine Solidarity organization.

There are six of us in the local [chapter] and we worked really, really well together as a group and [despite two of the organizers having a falling out,] they came to the same six-person meetings twice a week, ... that was kind of an incredible, I like really hold that we ran super-well together as a group.

Another participant's long-term vision for her work involves the hope to connect movements nationally and globally.

I think the results of my work ... [would ideally be] looking at developing communities ... I'm interested in like mutual aid and solidarity ... starting with [working with a grassroots group that created spaces to explore gender], it really made me think about [how] some of us had these resources and we just don't know where to just share

them ... so trying to like tap into mutual aid [is important], ... my dream would be where you ... could go around the country and [connect with various other projects], ... my dream would be to be a part of that network where that's sustained in some way.

Conflict within Movements

With collaboration comes the risk for conflict. Eleven participants reported experiences witnessing conflict in their organizations, with a range in the levels of how distressing the conflicts became for participants. Six participants reported having been in direct conflict with at least one other group member. The remaining five participants observed conflicts from within the group process.

One participant reported positive outcomes in their work with a girls' empowerment organization insofar as they were able to help the youth address bullying that occurs at the organization's camp.

I've watched bullying happen at camp and we address it, ... and we address it, ... we're really real with the kids about it and we don't tolerate it. Then you watch it sort of stop because there's a sense of accountability ... to each other and an accountability to the camp and they don't want to watch it happen to any other camper.

Another participant's organization had a conflict with a group member that was beginning to be addressed, and she noted that "there was this one person who came to our group who was really problematic in a lot of ways, touching people without consent, being very loud, taking up a lot of space physically and communicatively, not respecting people's identities." The person ultimately moved and the conflict dissipated. Group members were compassionate given

they saw the behaviors had developed from the person's trauma history, which led to creative ways of re-visioning how they could hold one another accountable for their behaviors.

It's nervewracking to do that, at least it was for me, [to come] to terms of being in a non-authoritarian setting. I wanted to be in this non-hierarchical position, [and] forcing people out or trying to forcibly change someone's behavior without understanding that person *per se*, that can lead to a lot of fucked-up problems and dynamics, so coming to terms with [the fact that] we do need some sort of level of structure to deal with these problems but that is in a non-oppressive way, and that is still developing, [we're] not quite clear on it, but one of the things we got out of that was the idea of doing healing circles.

The group ultimately developed small and intimate sub-groups with the intent to get "people emotionally connected with each other before conflict arises rather than just after conflict arises."

This participant was also one of two participants who observed factions form while doing student organizing. From her vantage point as a socialist, she observed that the socialists, revolutionary communists, and Maoists on campus would "spend so much energy fighting ... so it was this weird sectarian violence, and ... [that] infighting burned me out probably almost as much as anything else." Another participant participated in a national student organization that included "every different conceivable kind of radical" with chapters factionalizing and aligning based on common orientations.

Two participants left organizations as a result of conflicts within them. One participated in a heated argument where a dominating group member said multiple offensive statements that

would effectively block access to potential group members. After another difficult dialogue on a topic that he brought to the group was effectively silenced by other group members, he “took a little bit of stock, and realized I did not want to do that work.”

Another participant was forced to leave an organization he devoted considerable effort to, and he reported “the way it went down was terrible for me.” This participant’s experience is representative of those of two participants who became deeply entrenched in prolonged conflicts that arose in the organization. In a similarly hurtful manner, one participant had an ongoing conflict with a colleague who had previously been her mentor. She noted that “that interpersonal tension ... did really add to my feelings of self-doubt and my feelings of worthlessness.” This participant’s personal work and reflection in the subsequent years has helped her reframe her memory of the conflict in such a way that she has developed greater compassion for herself and others in the organization.

I know that I played a part in that, but I try to say that, “There was so much stress and so much terrible things going on.” ... So I try and forgive myself for any part I played in that, and realize that everybody was under a lot of stress, so [I am] not blaming myself, not blaming others, and that’s how I tried to deal with that, and it took me a while, [but initially] I felt really, really, really guilty and really bad about the fact that this relationship really went south.

One participant noted her sadness at observing conflicts lead to the dissolution of previously strong and committed relationships.

I’ve been doing this political work with the same people for a good amount of time, and so there’s a lot of interpersonal stuff that comes up with that and I think that just the way

that people's psychological parts and trauma [comes to the surface] in very close political relationships, and so you get to understand people's tendencies, you see where they struggle, their challenges, and ... the things that happen between us when we're kind of working in this work together in this sort of intense way is triggering for people

There's a real intimacy to the work, and the people that you're working with, and [it's difficult to watch falling outs] and it's so sad because you feel like you know the sort of bonds ... are some of our greatest hope in some ways ... and to see those bonds kind of wither away is one of the saddest things, and so I've had memories of watching that happen, and it's hard.

The Impact of Men and Patriarchy in Conflict-Ridden Group Processes

A notable form of conflict was reported across four interviews. These participants noted that conflicts were particularly difficult due to patriarchal behaviors. Two participants notably referenced the term “manarchist,” which is used in radical communities to denote how men play out oppressive behaviors such as taking up space at meetings in dialogue and displaying elitist or dominating behaviors.

One participant observed that the organization she was involved in “died out” largely as a result of patriarchy and white supremacy. The decline was evident as its membership changed from when she began working in the organization.

Certainly [when I started] ... that was when it was at its most diverse and then [we saw] lots of queer people, lots of people of color, and eventually lots of even straight white women leaving because they couldn't deal with the internal dynamics.

These dynamics emerged during a process where the organization encouraged emotional work internally.

[There were] a lot of men who are straight men who are socialized to not talk about their feelings...who weren't good at vocalizing their feelings and we would encourage them on it, like, "This is a part of like the revolution and feminism, you need to learn how to communicate and talk about feelings!" But then they kind of just used that as an excuse to like emotionally dump on specific women in their lives and they started to maybe play games where they pitted women against each other by talking shit about one woman to another woman and making one person feel like she was like the special confidante.

Another was especially angry at observing the hypocrisy of men's dialogic appeal for solidarity contrasted with their willingness to let women and gender variant people do work that is typically gendered as women's work.

In the groups that were sort of mixed gender, there's a lot of sexism that happened, especially in the anarchist groups that I was working in, and it pissed me off so bad, 'cause I was like, "How are you even gonna fuckin' do this work if we can't even fuckin' do it here?" ... And there was a lot of women saying something and then men saying the same thing and getting the credit for what they said, there was a lot of women doing the dishes, it was like really simple observations that I was like, "I'm fucking mad that this is happening here!"

She channeled her anger into collaborating with others to call out and address these behaviors.

And [we were] trying to create more awareness around that simply like, “Okay, so we all have to do the dishes, ... [and also] when someone says something, don’t repeat it and think that when you said it, it was genius.” ... [We were] making ... awareness posters of like, “Who’s doing the dishes?! Pay attention!” Or like, “Who is speaking?! Don’t speak over people!” ... I think [that this] was happening on a larger scale, not just in the community that I was in, but like looking around other zines and other experiences and talking to other people and that it continued still and I think that when I moved to [the city] and I started working at [a collective organization where] ... we had a women’s and trans group because there was so much dude-bro culture of like ... [the] manarchist as we would like to call it, and sort of breaking that down.

She eventually left that organization and began working with other organizations because that work to address these dynamics “gets tiresome, and I wanted to do something else.”

Another participant notes she “talks with a bunch of [other collective members] about how the meetings [at her organization] have a sort of boys’ club feel to it.”

In discussing group dynamics, one participant noted his gratitude that most of his work has been mostly in groups not dominated by men, in that he would have seen such conditions negatively affecting the group. “When I was in the [boycott campaign], there were definitely a bunch of men, but other than that, pretty much in my activist life, there have not been a lot of men. I’m thinking if there were maybe I’d have [more to say about internal group dynamics].”

Intersectionality and Sociocultural Locations

These discussions about patriarchy also fall within the realm of participants’ dedication to applying an intersectional analysis to their work and relationships. Participants spoke to issues

regarding a range of sociocultural locations including gender and gender non-conformity, race, class, disability, religion, privilege, and white supremacy. Ten participants spoke directly about intersectional frameworks utilized within their work and organizations.

Two participants spoke to their experiences within caucus groups at conferences, which allowed for dialogues to emerge between people who share common identities.

We would have caucuses, we had a caucus system and an auxiliary system ... [at] every convention ... [and] we would have a Working Class Caucus, a People of Color Caucus, a Women's Caucus, a Queer Caucus, a Trans Caucus, and sometimes ... [an] under-18 people's caucus.

Another participant noted that participating in a women's caucus was "a really transformative experience" and that dialogues where women found common concern helped influence the previously mentioned moratorium on men's voices during a portion of the conference.

Another participant noted that while in college, her involvement sought to address multiple oppressions: she was involved with an anti-racism group for white students, and also helped organize a queer and trans conference.

One participant credited an influential course in college with helping her develop an awareness of "intersectionality and variable oppressions," and after taking the course, "it felt like all of a sudden seeing the world in whole new ways and I was seeing what was screwed up every day and I couldn't *not* do anything I felt even if it's hard, I had to try and find my place wherever that place might be." She attributes "being intersectional and having a broader picture view" as an important framework in her life:

I came into this through working in harm reduction and ... in my head [my analysis ties in] a lot with that philosophy, and not trying to ban harmful behaviors just because you don't like them, I think it has a lot broader implications beyond worlds of sex work and drugs, [intersectionality] actually gets [at] a lot.

Five participants discussed feminism as a major framework for thought. Ten discussed gender and gender identity. Nine participants identify as queer, two others mention that they have some flexibility in their sexuality, and participants mentioned involvement in queer organizing. Seven participants identifying as trans or a gender non-conforming identity, five discussed their work in doing organizing around trans issues and gender identity, and two discussed their processes of gender identity development.

A participant's developing awareness of misogyny in a Women's Studies course influenced how her "life really shifted" and she became aware of how "without knowing it [I] ... saw a lot of sexism and misogyny in my life" and could reframe negative beliefs about herself that resulted from those early experiences.

Everything started falling into place for me and clicking and the idea that like actually this is like a larger oppression and it's not an individual thing that you do wrong, especially with sexual harassment, especially with not getting promoted, like all these things that I thought that I was falling short as a person [were] based in an institutionalized oppression of sexism so that was my first sort of personal connection to feminism was making sense of my life [in that I] didn't feel like a personal failure.

Another noted that in contrast to critiques of mainstream feminism, she appreciates a radical feminist analysis, which she demonstrates through this example:

Radical feminism is about the people who are most impacted, ... [and when impacted, they] get to make the decisions about that, so if you live in the neighborhood where there's a proposal for the incinerator, you make the decision about whether the incinerator comes to your neighborhood, not your city council person who's getting paid off, or your governor who wants to use it to fund ... scholarships or whatever bullshit. Yeah, I'm about [the idea that] the people who are most marginalized getting to have the biggest voice because they have the most experience that's gonna help us fix it.

One participant demonstrated the intersections between feminism and trans issues through explicating her framework for political analysis. She had noted her evolution from developing a second-wave feminist analysis in high school to one where she incorporates intersectional analyses into her feminist frameworks: "I still really identify as a feminist and I work toward ... [having] a feminist analysis that is infused with a race and class politic, ... and a queer analysis and a trans feminist and a different-body politic." She remarks that she has commitment to her feminist elders, who can have transphobic stances, and that she uses her intersectional analysis to frame her approach to their transphobia.

I feel really tender and I feel really responsible to like feminists especially like cis[gender] women, feminists in their 50s, 60s, and 70s, ... those are my elders ... [and] there's a lot of hurt especially around trans stuff where some second-wave feminists were maliciously transphobic [by advocating for such things as] "Women-Born-Women-Only space" and things like that ... I do feel very [into the idea of doing work to address transphobia] with lesbian feminist dykes, [and] straight feminists in their 50s, 60s, 70s.

One participant noted that he left a feminist group after a *de facto* leader shot down the idea that his friend who was a transwoman could not participate in the group, “That was a little two-faced!”

Given multiple pressures that trans* and gender non-conforming people face, their activism has provided an important site of resistance and community building at the same time. The participant who was previously cited as having participated in a trans and genderqueer contingent at a major protest credits her work in a volunteer peer support network for gender non-conforming people as helpful in her process of “really focusing my activism” and developing her facilitation and strategizing skills that she’s carried into other organizations as well.

Another participant who credited work in his Women’s Studies Department devoted two years to helping organize a conference around the intersections between feminist and transgender movements.

That was a major project for two years [in the early 2000s] that took a lot of resources and did a lot of work, it was [about asking] ... how do we connect feminism to the transgender movement in a way that isn’t as harmful as it’s being, ’cause ... we just saw all these connections between feminism and the transgender movement and we were like, “Why is it that these two movements aren’t working together, they’re working against each other?” So [we were also trying to influence]... bringing transgender academics into Women’s Studies academics at a school that we were [while also asking,] “How is it we’re in a Women’s Studies program and we’re not talking about transgender movement at all?” That seems pretty whack.

All participants spoke to their awareness of multiple, intersecting oppressions affecting them and those with whom they work/for whom they advocate. One who began activist work in high school noted that doing “mostly feminist [work], and later more anti-racist feminist work, ... started to get [me] really angry about the world,” which influenced her vision of herself as “ready to fight!” Another expressed concern that anti-oppression group processes can impact organizations’ strategies toward their missions, but discusses a belief that the two are very complementary in working toward liberation and social justice.

Somehow there’s got to be a balance of taking into consideration these systemic oppressions and how they affect us on an individual level and ... and that such dynamics [exist] in the organization... balancing that with the larger overall critique of capitalism, critique of the state, critique of how those oppressive systems of white supremacy and patriarchy actually existed in society ... So I guess I haven’t really been a part of an organization that has effectively balanced those two things.

Anti-racist work and concern about racism emerged in seven participants’ interviews. One participant was involved in anti-racist group for white students at her undergraduate institution, and has carried frameworks from that work into other realms of organizing. All participants are white, and none discussed personally experiencing overt or covert racism, but several discussed thoughts, frameworks, and actions that have helped address and deconstruct racism. Two participants spoke to the importance of People of Color leadership, and one discussed a group process that became complicated in discussing how to structure their group as a People of Color-led group.

I think [that process was] sort of alienating to the People of Color in the group who were like actually like, “Yeah, we’re into that, also we’re into the group as it is, and we like

feel invested, and it's not your group either, you know?" So that was a thing that kept happening over and over and over again, and I was thinking maybe the group would have gotten more done in the time that it was really active and people weren't so lost in their anxieties about that.

This harkens the concerns a participant mentioned earlier about how to structure balance between anti-oppression/anti-racism work within the group with the strategizing necessary to carry out an organization's mission. A variation between both narratives is that this participant's experience highlights how white supremacy culture likely influenced the phenomenon where white organizers advocated for what they perceived as POC organizers' concerns as opposed to enacting what POC organizers actually sought from this process, which bred alienation.

One of our like major leaders of color who'd been there from the beginning, and who had been like super invested in leading the organization, was sort of like, "I'm out, I'm over this, I'm not gonna sit around with this conversation anymore."

Similarly, in discussing how the importance of role models in her work, another participant noted the tendency of white radicals, when finding such role models, to "fetishize People of Color in a way," with the example of hearing statements such as "Malcolm X was the coolest person ever," which she rebuts with "You can't do what Malcolm X did because you're not in that place in society." She calls for an approach that is less that of potentially disengaged fetishtization versus respecting those who have done active ally work in the past, providing a case in point:

Some of the people in my study group are connected to this group of white lesbians who are now like their 60s or 70s who are super-badass and were breaking Assata Shakur out

of prison and doing all these radical actions, in the '70s and even like up until the '80s and ... I feel like that's really helpful for me as an activist to [see] I have ancestors.

One participant credits her work with People of Color as deeply meaningful.

I think there's this sort of sense of fraughtness in terms of the way that race plays out in our country ... that white people are too racist to really be in true solidarity or sort of see themselves as aligned with struggle with People of Color or ... [there are] deep-seated senses of [being] told that we can't be together. ... The cross-racial nature of our work is really deep and emotionally, I think it's really healing to sit in a room with people across color lines in a way that feels so true and so real to be hearing the real truths of people's struggles and breaking that isolation of a sense of "you need to kind of be with your own," I mean, ... I grew up in a really homogenous white Irish and Italian working-class [neighborhood that] in general is so segregated and compartmentalized [that] ... it's impossible to build something across those divisions and I think the emotional impact of bringing people together in rooms that they never imagined themselves being in ... and really struggling together with ... harkens back to like Civil Rights Movement when Martin Luther King talks about the Beloved Community. ... I think it's been really deeply healing and it feels hopeful and powerful.

Multiple participants mentioned their experiences with oppression during their activist careers. One participant named to a group his experience observing internalized Anti-Semitism in dialogue and behaviors, which was not welcomed within the group. Another noted that his experiences associated with identities that occupy multiple sociocultural locations have helped forge his desire to organize.

I'm ... a disabled queer trans man [and I am at a] juncture of, "What do I do with that?" ... there were these other differences in my life that said "Hey, there are these problems that need to be changed," and every activist has those reasons why they care.

Two participants spoke to their privilege as a means for enhancing their work. One noted a friend helped connect her to a group where people who have class privilege organize for economic justice through wealth distribution. Another noted multiple ways her privilege has helped catalyze her organizing:

I've been lucky in a lot of ways in my life... like I don't have any kids, I have a decent job, you know? ... And I have some financial security in my life, so I feel like that enables me to have time to do things ... so I feel like it's like imperative on me that I do something.

Group Dynamics

It is noteworthy that all participants discussed the nature of group dynamics, with a variety of experiences ranging from supportive and inclusive to conflictual. Most of the participants' experiences that qualify these dynamics have been quoted previously and will be referenced in general terms in this section.

Regarding one participant's experience at a conference, she noted, "the personal dynamics in the room are part of systems of inequality and that really changed things for me." Seven participants referenced internal conflicts, as mentioned in the conflicts section, as memorable group dynamics. Two mentioned the impact of factions along radical ideological

lines, as quoted earlier. Three discussed the impact of men's socialization and patriarchy on group dynamics.

Two participants referenced experiences where the group expectations involved "constantly pushing each other to work all the time." This participant mentioned that this pressure was coupled with support. However, the other participant was noting her experience in campus activist groups that functioned as a negative feedback loop for her and her colleagues.

I think that starting with the first groups I worked with, there was a real dynamic of "Who's the hardest working activist?" In a way that's like policing each other, not supporting each other, working until you dropped in a way that was really unsustainable and judgmental and not healthy.

Six participants referenced memories of solidarity, collaboration, and support as memorable ones, ranging from the participant's experience that resembled the Beloved Community to the one who mentioned close friends and her girlfriend as important sources of support to process work within her anti-prison campaign. Two mentioned the sense of solidarity and support that helped increase their senses of safety at large-scale marches and rallies.

Two notable outliers to these trends of discussing dynamics emerged.

One participant discussed the paradox he experienced in groups that strive to have flat hierarchies, often a trademark within directly democratic organizations that may be patterned on anarchist frameworks. He noted that seemingly the more a group tries to enforce such a framework, the more obvious the hierarchies and power struggles are that emerge.

It's interesting, [I've noticed in] every group that I've been a part of [that] has a heavy emphasis on not being hierarchical, ... the louder people complain that they're against hierarchies, the faster hierarchies appear in the group and the more people need to build those hierarchies. ... I think it's more successful when [groups and leaders are] honest about it and recognize the hierarchies that are there, rather than really stridently insisting that you're not the leader, [yet] everybody should just do what you say.

As an example, he referenced the previously mentioned feminist group that operated without a leader, yet had an influential and dominating facilitator who blocked access for a transwoman to enter the group.

Contrasting that experience, one participant discussed the accepting and inclusive nature of her collective organization. In mentioning that several people with distinct personalities and probably mental health issues have engaged with the group throughout her time there, she attributed their attraction to its work to its inclusive nature.

I feel like the kind of people who are drawn to the [organization] end up coming [because] sometimes they're in a very transient place and sometimes they have a lot of other things going on ... It takes most comers, a whole lot of types of people coming through the door, like traveling kids, tourists, high schoolers in from the suburbs. It's a wide range [of people], it's a good place to get up on your soapbox if you're that way inclined and for the most part, ... unless you're staggeringly incompetent, you can get a lot of autonomy pretty quickly and sometimes even if you are incompetent, you can.

Patterns of Participation

Participants have a variety of experiences with participation in social movements that include sustained participation, scaling back participation, participation in a variety of movements, abeyance (shifting between movements), and leaving movements. Multiple participants display a combination of these types of behaviors.

Six participants report sustained participation. One mentioned that her involvement with a prison service organization has lasted nearly a decade and the organization's structural needs motivate her to remain with it long-term.

One of the reasons I think that I've stayed really involved with [the organization] is partially just because [there's a] a need ... [for] more people in leadership roles. But also I think I really like doing behind-the-scenes work. I like doing bookkeeping and doing like grant writing and things like that.

Despite her own hesitations that she should do more direct action work, she benefited from the realization that work where she can exercise her administrative organizational strengths has helped sustain her.

It took me a long time to say, "Okay, this is my skill set, this is what I feel comfortable with, and it's also really needed, there's not a lot of people who want to do bookkeeping or doing those kind of things, and I contribute in that way, and that's okay."

Another participant who has had sustained participation has done so through scaling back her level of participation. She has balanced in opportunities for self-care; prioritized work put into her romantic relationship, and reduced the amount of hours she works as a professional organizer. She reports that this process correlates with continued contemplation of her sense of responsibility as a change maker, which has left her "overwhelmed ... and a little sluggish politically because of that."

Six participants have displayed shifting between movements or organizations in recent years, but remaining within social movements. Two did so as a result of moves between cities, and two as a result of transitioning from campus activist roles to activists within the context of the city's interconnected networks organizations and neighborhoods. One was forced to leave an organization and has shifted to other social movements. Another's shift has correlated with a movement's shift: after an encampment movement's work shifted such that its committees have begun their own organizational work, this participant's organizational involvement has evolved alongside the original movement's evolution.

Three participants are involved with three or more organizations and have periods where they observe their patterns of participation waxing and waning, while not dropping out of movement work. One was quoted earlier in saying that she does regular capacity check-ins and will take breaks when necessary. Another notices that his "spike[s] in activity usually means that something's up and there tends to be a crash point."

One participant has currently left activism over the last year, and focuses on creative work. He had opportunities to re-structure his life, which was experienced "some sort of transformative [experience ... and] I've been focusing my energies more so in the last couple of months on creative work."

The Importance of Hard Work

Nine participants commented on their tendencies to meet organizational needs through hard work.

Two commented on their awareness of trends for activists in the 1970s to have more time to devote to activist work, one of whom referenced that her movement-oriented housing co-

operative had a ground rule where its members were expected to work no more than roughly 20 hours/week of paid work so as to maximize their engagement in movement work. Though the economic infrastructure and social services that enabled this phenomenon to occur has changed, one participant has structured his life similarly, and reports feeling fortunate he can devote more time to organizing.

I'm very, very lucky because I work part-time, and I'm able to survive on very low income, ... which I know is like a very special circumstance that most people are not able to do. ... I knew because I didn't have to work all the time that I should just be doing organizing all the time, and so ... that was how that worked.

He noted that once he began work with a national student organization, "for the next two years from that point, it was [the organization's work] all day, every day."

Another referenced his "workaholism" such that, at his job that is activist-oriented, "I am that person where [if someone says] ... 'We need four more hours of overtime at work,' and I'm like, 'Yes! I will take that!'"

The participant who noticed that others were "constantly pushing each other to work all the time" explained his analysis as to why this phenomenon occurs, acknowledging that it represents an expression of internalized form of oppression wrought by capitalism.

I think that it has to do with the ways that we internalize capitalist values and [how we] don't know how to understand the worth of our lives unless we're working all the time and producing something, whether it's a fucking constant barrage of e-mails or something else. And that's part of what I think, part of what I was doing in the time that I wasn't working was, "I'm just alive on the planet for a couple months and felt horrible

about it, I'm worthless because I'm not doing anything, I'm not making money, I'm not responding to my e-mails." ... Well, who are you when nobody's telling you what to do? Who are you when you're not reacting all the time to a million stimuli?

Feeling Pressured or Drained

The previous statement expresses a sense of feeling pressured, overwhelmed, or drained by the work that eleven participants alluded to.

That participant was one of two who expressed that, over time, they became aware that their activist work and general focus on productivity has demonstrated a propensity to avoid their feelings. As another participant said, her work seemed to be "in conjunction with not wanting to face trauma and things in my life that I was avoiding."

One participant who noted their activist work is fairly contained, acknowledged the self-protective nature of that decision given their experience with a demanding job:

When I come home from work, I've heard the things ... that are horrible about this world ... and the last thing I want to do is hear about it more, you know? I just wanna watch fuckin' *Glee*²!

Two participants noted that they worked on activist work when they had down time at their paid work, with two having had their workloads change such that they could not do so any longer, and one having left movement work. One noted that in the past she intentionally structured her paid work to allow her to work 30 hours per week, while devoting 15-20 hours per

² Murphy, 2009.

week to her organization's work, and motivated herself to do so though she was depressed at the time. She continues to report feeling pressure that she should do more work for the organization.

One participant noted a type of malaise associated with her activist work that she termed "political depression."

It's [associated with] not knowing where my actions are going, at that point is just like trying to do like internal calculus of where my energy is best spent, but then also ... that feeling I'm not fine, the choices don't matter, the world's going to shit, like, it's just wrong and I'm down, but in a politically informed way, you know? We're probably at the point where global climate change is going to kill probably billions of people.

She spoke to her resistance to adopting nihilist and defeatist views despite having heard threads of them in her statement, but references the nature of integrating both pessimism with committed political resistance, and holds that while there are inspiring "pinpoints of resistance" in movements, "the political depression is strung throughout that."

Factors that Prevent Participants from Devoting More Time to Organizing

In contrast to two participants' remarks that they have structured their paid work in such a way as to maximize their time to devote to organizing, five participants have had experiences where their full-time jobs have prevented them from devoting as much time as they would like to organizing.

I think the biggest [demand on my time] is I have a full-time job at a non-profit. And ... it's been a job that's progressively gotten busier and more difficult and [requires] more hours. Whereas when I started it was easy to do [campaign work] at work and now it's pretty much not a possibility anymore. So like that's really shifted my relationship between my paid work and my organizing work, so that's a big demand.

Two participants consider their jobs to be activist or organizing work. One of them remarked that he joined an encampment movement during a period of unemployment, “I was like, ‘Well, I don’t have a job ... I could get off my ass and show up, and I did.’” Becoming involved in movement work dovetailed well with his willingness to balance multiple activist projects, including his current job.

Two participants are full-time graduate students who are pleased that they don’t struggle to find time to organize. One mentioned that “a friend ... told me ... before they started grad school ... [that] you can only have two of the three [possible options]: grad school, friends, or organizing. I will fight that!” Another mentioned that it seemed paradoxical she had more opportunity to organize while a PhD student than when she was doing her master’s program.

When I was in my master’s program, I would say I was less involved ... time-wise ... which, you would think then, in my PhD program, I would be less involved, but I’ve become more involved over that time.

One participant has had sustained activist work over 15 years, but took a break when he moved to another state to care for his grandmother as she was dying. He has also prioritized more time in recent years to spend with friends and his friends’ children. Another participant also mentioned that caregiving was a time constraint for him, which was part of his memory of being overloaded while balancing work, activism, and time providing care.

For example, I’m not personally a parent, but I am close to people who are parents and who I am sometimes called upon to provide support work [as they provide care work, and] there are people in my close networks who are disabled and who have sort of chronic health problems ... and I’m committed to providing support when they need it.

Two participants noted that health flare-ups can limit their capacity to organize.

Participants' Experiences in their Family Systems

Participants have a range of experiences within their family systems in terms of their reactions to their activist orientations.

One participant's parents alienated him due to his activism, which was in contrast to their values as "very conservative, religious, [and] very wealthy." They have subsequently disowned him. He has found alternative sources of support from within the family system, particularly when he had dinner with an uncle and found out that they had been involved in the same movement, which "was just this great sort of embracing moment of having that [common bond], and since then, we keep in touch."

Another four participants have experienced strained reactions within their relationships with their parents as a result of their activism and identities. One participant remarked that her politicization process disrupted the *status quo* within her family of origin and tightknit extended family system:

[My politicization] was really threatening in the sense of like, "We're not really ready to go there with you," so there was like a lot of shock ... [because] before that, in high school before I was politicized, I was like everyone else, pretty self-concerned and not thinking about larger sort of socioeconomic issues.

Another remarked upon the conflicted nature of having to structure a "double-life" while developing an activist identity:

I feel like my family, in terms of my grandmother who was the main person who raised me, she's a pretty conservative person, and the activism I was doing at the time in college was really radical and ... I think that a lot of people struggle when they go to college and they learn all these radical ideas and bring them back to their family, and I definitely was

living a double-life with her where I was like not out [of the closet] slash we were arguing a lot about really simple things around racism and feminism that were pretty basic ideas and it was definitely a wedge between us for a long time – it was difficult. ... I feel like I come from a pretty racist, conservative family, that I'd never connected with and then after sort of getting into activism and feeling really passionate about it in a way that like I couldn't not speak out against the things they were saying.

This person also spoke to the importance of structuring a “chosen family” through the years of close friends, housemates, dates, partners, and co-workers, which helped balance the disaffection she had from her family of origin.

Two haven't experienced strain or alienation as a result of their activism, but their parents' reactions to their work reflects a strong sense of difference from one another.

[My] family ... are pretty into [my work], sometimes I don't think she gets the extent to just how far left I've swung, we have a lot of arguments about voting but, but she likes this in theory, and they make a lot of anarchist jokes.

Another reflected:

My parents think I'm a weird hippie communist or something. My dad is always calling me a communist, and I'm like, “You actually have no idea what you're talking about, and it doesn't even make sense.” ... They think I'm really extreme which is funny because of the people I know; I'm actually not all that extreme.

Four have supportive family systems, two of whom report that members of their families of origin don't necessarily understand, but are supportive. One participant's remarks are representative of this phenomenon: “I also think my family is an important support in all of it too, as like, not really understanding sometimes, but trying to be supportive, and it's very sweet,

and [they'll] ask interesting questions and ask really annoying questions.” She remarks that she is close with her sister who can react to her political frameworks sometimes with annoyance, but also with the inquisitive nature of someone who seeks the participant's consultation on how to understand certain topics.

My sister [will say,] “Ughhh, there she goes again” if I rant about something political, and then at other moments ... [she'll send] me a YouTube video and is like, “What do you think about this?” [And the video will discuss issues] like race and gender and stuff.

Finally, one participant spoke praises of her mother and her mother's pride in her activism, and this person also expressed gratitude that her experience contrasts those of other friends who've had little to no support from their families.

My mom, the first time I got arrested at a protest, Fox News actually took this awesome picture of me lying on the ground and there's a cop that has his knee on my back and he's like handcuffing me. My mom hung it up on the fridge and it was there for like *five years*! And she loved to tell people, “My daughter gets arrested at protests!” ... She used to get a little bit annoyed about it and be like, “I worry about you,” now she's actually pretty chill with it. ... My mom also gives donations to all the groups I'm a part of – *she's fucking great*!

Burnout

I don't wanna be lazy, I don't wanna be a sellout, ... but then also know for myself that I need to find balance too! ... That comes with a lot of emotion for me ... around like, “Am I doing enough? Oh my gosh, I'm exhausted, am I getting burnt out? ... I know that my energy in organizing propels more energy for me, and it's fulfilling in a way, but how do I make sure that it doesn't get too far out there?”

The experience of burnout is not a prevailing theme across the sample of participants, with six participants explaining that they've experienced some form of activist burnout, and another three discussing their observations of how others in their communities have burnt out, contemplations on burnout prevention, and how to make movements sustainable. This reflective stance of someone who has not experienced burnout is embodied in one participant's statement, which also points toward the idea that the risks for burnout are of enough concern in activist communities that it is a salient and ongoing conversation.

You hear a lot about burnt out activists, right? And I think there's a lot in the water about sustainable organizing [and] individuals being sustainable in collectives [and] movements, ... [and striving] towards movement building rather than just like burnout cycles.

This participant does not report experiencing any type of burnout, but does acknowledge her level of participation when in her early 20's was a risk factor for it. Given she is now "trying for the long-haul [while] ... not feel[ing] like I have to be involved in everything," she contrasts this experience to when "I was 22 or 23 I went through like two years of saying 'yes' to everything, and luckily it was ... a very sweet two years."

The participant who no longer participates in activist groups was explicit in remarking that his departure was related to having a shift in priorities and life experiences and not burnout: "I don't think it's as simple as like, 'Oh, I got burnt out so I had to stop you know?' I think sort of harkening back [my] transformative moment."

Three participants have observed that their patterns of organizing are cyclical in nature, where they have over time observed they can sustain themselves if they allow some time to scale

back their involvement. How one of these participants has stated that she “x[es]-off some days” for herself is indicative of this approach. The others’ observations of their patterns reflect a similar need to balancing in time for themselves or responding to the body’s cues to rest.

I’ve never experienced burnout in the way that’s meant that [I have] totally left a group. But I feel like I’ve definitely had moments with [my organization] where [I] realize I’m not like doing very much and not really accomplishing what I’m saying I’m going to accomplish, and it feels like I’m starting to take a break ... [and] then it’s like my body or my mind telling me to take a break, but it’s like that process of burnout. But I haven’t ever crashed and burned in a way that it meant that I didn’t show up to the next meeting.

One such participant notices her patterns and responds by prioritizing time spent by herself and with friends, while still doing some organizing. She also reports observing conversations regarding sustainability and burnout within her networks of friends, and later mentioned her participation in workshops that discussed such issues.

I used to run in these almost like four-month cycles of three months of being [a] super-intense organizer and then burn out, and like one month of like, “Okay, let me just do the bare minimum that I need to do to [make] my commitment to the place I’m living and maybe some other relationships I have, but I’m not going to be on conference calls and ... [do other things, but I’ll] maybe organize an event that month” and so ... I started to realize it’s [been] about seven years of this [level of activity], so I’d say the first [three or four] years, I was going through these cycles of three months on, a month off and ... then I started to realize that that was a cycle and I was like “Okay, I need to be more

sustainable,” and around that time, I felt like a lot more ... people around me were having conversations about burnout and being sustainable.

Two participants had experienced crashes in their undergraduate experiences, but have developed sustained involvement in the intervening years. One had a “crisis moment” where he first sought a therapist, and also reported becoming sick after semesters ended due to exhaustion from balancing activism with schoolwork. Another said she burnt out and stopped organizing for a period after she and colleagues on campus did not win an academic freedom campaign at their university.

Two participants have responded to experiences of fatigue and reduced satisfaction with their work by scaling back involvement and discussing sustainability with others. One was previously quoted as discussing her experience of reducing her hours at her job as an organizer and incorporating an array of self-care practices to sustain her commitment to political work. The other reports:

The way burnout is manifesting is lack of clarity, lack of focus, just sort of a feeling of drifting or being lost, not really know what I’m doing, not really having a clear mission anymore. I’ve lost a lot of my identity basically, and my confidence to some degree. ... So I’m still ... organizing, not nearly as much, and I guess other than therapy, [I’m] having conversations with friends, and trying to figure out what a sustainable approach to activism would be, and also reading about it, ... and going to workshops and presentations about burnout.

Emotional Experiences with Activism

Findings presented with the “meaningful and transformative nature of the work” theme reflect a range of heartfelt and positive emotions participants experience when organizing. Emotional and affective experiences that participants report reflect the range of human experience from negative emotions to ones reflecting deep awe and passion for the work.

Pride was overtly reported by three participants, while all participants seemed to reflect pride over their identities and histories of organizing. One participant reported pride in their youth empowerment organization’s ability to expand outreach and recruit campers from a variety of the city’s neighborhoods that have high rates of poverty and that are predominately People of Color: “We’re getting more kids...from [these neighborhoods], which is *amazing!*”

This participant appeared as if bursting with pride in recounting their facilitating workshops on gender, non-binary gender identities, and preferred gender pronouns.

I really feel like my heart could have just exploded like 60 times over when I ran this workshop and I had like 30 eight-year-olds being like, “My name’s [name] and my [preferred gender pronouns] are she, her, and coconut, and ... peanut butter pie!” And I could’ve fuckin’ died just to see how normal that was ... that these kids got it in a way, at *eight*. ... [And then I’d work with] 11 to 13-year-old girls [who were] talking about biology and ... then we’re talking about chromosomal abnormalities and ... we’re talking about non-binary genders and it was like, “You’re fuckin’ 12, like, *you are 12*, like I couldn’t wrap my brain around any of this stuff till I was 25!”

Another participant was previously quoted as saying her “highs and lows” are worth it given that the highs associated with her campaign’s actions help her and her colleagues feel

“powerful.” Another participant reports her transformative justice and prison abolition work is a source of hope:

I think that it allows me to feel hopeful about the future and hopeful about ... the possibility of prison abolition, hopeful about the possibility of communities responding to harm in a way that feels like [the community can respond] not only when harm is happening but like proactively doing education and knowing your neighbors and having a different sort of like neighborhood and community altogether to have the capacity for transformative justice. It allows me to like continue on when things are hard because I know that there's work being done to build this better future.

One participant remarked upon a collective sense of ambivalence while organizing with a reproductive justice organization that had successfully increased access for those seeking abortion services to have doula support services. In discussing how the group reacted to shaping services provided in the city, he was surprised in retrospect at their reaction to this phenomenon.

I think that's funny, I think that [the organization] was very bad at acknowledging any kind of good work that we did or that people were really, really hard on themselves, individually and as a group. And I actually found myself very often, “Okay, well, we need to do this thing and we need to do this thing,” rather than being like, “Hey, look at all these things we've done!”

Anger and frustration are common, especially as demonstrated in the findings on conflict, feeling pressured, and the impact of patriarchy on group dynamics. One participant noted that she felt frustrated with a social group for queers on campus that provided a learning opportunity for her to re-frame her approach to work with the group.

It was frustrating, I would try constantly to get the [group] to get more political, and it didn't always work, and it was like a moment of learning ... [and I'd say], "Let go and let goddess, this group wants to be social so I'm not going to try make it political when it's not."

Anger also propelled three participants to advocate for change in their groups' structure and dynamics and to mobilize energy for their groups' processes and actions. The former is seen in two participants' experiences being angry at men's behaviors in their groups, while the latter is evidenced in the participant whose activism has helped her access "the place in me that's just angry about the way the world is and [became ready to] fight."

Two participants have expressed experiences along the spectrum of guilt and shame, with one having been quoted as believing she should do more work despite a high level of commitment to her organization. Another has processed his experience with shame over time.

My approach to activism for so long was completely self-subordinating. And it was all-encompassing, probably in an extreme way. ... I don't have the same motivation or drive that I once did, and that worries me. I know I should be doing more, or I guess, I don't know if I should ... be doing more, and ... I shame myself into a vicious circle of ... feel[ing] shame about myself and then I am in a worse place, so then I don't do more, and then I do more self-soothing behaviors [that I'm ashamed of, and] I guess it's like a spiral of shame. ... I guess the bigger thing is I don't know what I'm doing, [and] I don't feel the same hope or optimism that I did for social change to occur or revolution to occur.

Another participant reported his realization that his combined care work and activism spoke to a process of “self-effacement” consistent with his report of having struggled with experiencing his emotions.

I think there are ways, of course, to care for others that are healthy and there are ways to care that are not and I was thinking at one point about how for a long time I sort of conceived of a lot of the activism that I did as ally work and in retrospect I think sort of analogously to this pattern, “Oh of course! ... Ally work lets you feel like generous and powerful instead of mangled.”

Prevalence of Eating Disorders, Compulsive Behaviors, or Other Mental Health Issues Associated with Avoidance

A variety of mental health issues that are associated with anxiety disorders or that arise in response to trauma and experiential avoidance were reported by participants. One participant reports shame in his coping strategies of excessive use of the Internet, watching movies, and watching YouTube videos. He finds that these are “numbing behaviors [as a result of being] in emotional pain.” One other participant discussed that she had developed claustrophobia as an undergraduate student, which was her presenting problem in her first course of therapy as an adult. One participant mentioned experiences with having panic attacks. One participant had received treatment for cocaine dependence and also participated in Alcoholics Anonymous for four years.

One finding was that 33.33%, or four of the study’s participants had received treatment for eating disorders in their teens or early 20’s. This was in contrast to the prevalence of eating disorders in the general population at a variety of rates considerably lower than 33.33%: 1.0-

2.4% for Anorexia Nervosa; 1.0-1.7% for Bulimia Nervosa; and up to 2.4% for Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (Rikani et al., 2013; Smink, van Hoeken, & Hoek, 2012).

Two had received inpatient treatment for their symptoms, with one having stepped down to intensive outpatient treatment followed up by outpatient treatment. Two reported only outpatient treatment for their eating disorders, and all four had participated in outpatient psychotherapy while experiencing symptoms.

While a campus activist, one participant reported she noticed the correlation of her eating disorder with experiencing activist burnout.

It [would] come out in [the form of] an eating disorder often with organizing slash school slash avoiding feelings, like the control that I did have was not eating and so that was something in college that was very much part of the burnout ... [as seen in] not taking care of myself, working myself way too hard and then like just falling down.

One credits their recovery with accessing their therapist who exposed them to feminism, which “really saved my life, like in a real way, ’cause I was dying.”

Presenting Problems in Therapy

A variety of experiences functioned as presenting problems for participants when beginning therapy.

When three of the four previously mentioned participants who sought treatment for their eating disorders, they sought mental health care for the first time on an individual basis. One of them had previously gone to two family therapy sessions as a teenager. One of the participants was treated on an outpatient basis for his eating disorder, and was treated earlier in his teens

when experiencing suicidal ideation. Two other participants have sought therapists while experiencing suicidal ideation as adults. One sought her first therapist after developing elevated levels of anger that were associated with aggressive fantasies.

Eight participants involuntarily began treatments as adolescents or college students, including those who've been treated for eating disorders. One was treated for depression as a high school student. One was treated for anger issues and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and another's parents found her a therapist since they thought she was "not focused enough on school and [was] acting out." She noted the strong sense of ambivalence across the board with these participants about the forced nature of child and adolescent therapy, "I don't really know exactly what [my parents'] rationale was, ... so I was kind of only half-consensually [engaged with] the therapy process." Two other participants were mandated by their colleges' policies to start therapy as undergraduate students, one as a condition of her leave of absence and another was twice referred after he experienced two sexual assaults, which was mandatory for survivors at the campus.

All participants have voluntarily sought therapy as an adult, which was by and large met by the previously mentioned participants who'd been treated involuntary as a more empowering process as it was self-directed. One participant who was treated for an eating disorder was referred to a therapist from their IOP and has remained in treatment with her for over a decade. One participant sought treatment due to stress arising after her parents' divorce, another after her break-up with an ex-partner. One sought treatment to process complex grief after a close friend's suicide. One sought treatment to process his depression that arose after being forced to leave an organization, and another referred herself to her current therapist after her health flare-up associated with activist burnout.

One participant has had multiple courses of treatment as an adult with therapists and psychiatrists to manage depression, social anxiety, and ADHD. This person sought specialized Cognitive Behavioral Therapy treatment to receive training in how to restructure negative beliefs about herself. One began treatment to manage symptoms associated with his diagnoses of Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: “I’ve periodically tried to find a therapist I try to work with, which usually ends on a sour note and I walk away from it.”

One participant started therapy as an adult with his current therapist, after noticing possible alexithymia and difficulty feeling his emotions, and stated his goal as, “I would like to feel feelings more fully.”

One sought brief treatment after her partner moved to the city from out of state, and was also about to begin couples counseling shortly after her interview. She had struggled with multiple periods of seeking a therapist while overwhelmed with balancing graduate school, organizing, her relationship, and her relationships with friends. The fact that these facets of her life required going between neighborhoods in the city that are time-consuming to go between has made it difficult to access therapists that meet her needs, who are often in another disparate neighborhood from those where her home and school are. She has brought to her last course of treatment intention to work on goals related to gender and sexuality, and seeks to find individual therapists who affirm kink and are “queer/poly[amory]-positive, sex-positive, [and] trans-knowledgeable.” Another participant seeks queer-competent therapists, as she has run up against therapists who will focus dialogue on queerness at the expense of her self-directed goals of working on “family trauma [and] co-dependency.”

Do Participants Discuss Activism and Organizing with Their Therapists?

Ten participants discussed that they discuss activism in therapy to some degree. One participant's summation of these dialogues, in that he "sometimes [discusses] interpersonal stuff that comes up in organizing work as it does in any other human collaborative effort, but it is certainly not the focus of our work together," is representative of four of these nine participants' experience.

One such participant expresses some surprise at such a disconnect existing given that she accessed her therapist to treat burnout. She finds her a support in coping with the burnout "inasmuch as she's helped me identify practices ... and somatic stuff that have helped me kind of work through a lot of the negative emotions associated with burnout and exhaustion [and] depletion," but reports that she rarely discusses her organizing or political questions with her therapist, which speaks to a "disconnect between the political work and my work with her." Another participant remarked that she does not discuss her activist work often in therapy, except at times when she'll talk about intensive activities such as planning a fundraising event. She, however, does find that, much like the previous participant, her work in therapy builds her capacity to provide sustained commitment to organizing:

[Therapy's something] that keeps me mentally healthy ... [and does] support my activism because it allows me to be sort of a reliable, reasonable person that's not riding a roller coaster of emotions and sort of dropping out/dropping in, but I'm able to be steady, I'm able to be... more consistent with my activism.

One participant does note that she only talks about activism in therapy when she feels particularly stressed with her organizing, and that, early in her course of treatment, she discussed it more often. She and her therapist deepened their alliance through multiple processes:

establishing they frame their work as feminist therapy; discussing their differences in sociocultural location as her therapist is a queer woman clinician of color; discussing that while her therapist is not an activist, she does validate and understand the participant's political frameworks; and establishing a holding environment early in the process of forming their relationship.

So I had a *lot* of questions [when I started, such as,] “Can I talk about my whiteness? Is that going to offend you?” Those kinds of things. ... One way I think about it is like, within the therapy space, [is through my asking], “Okay, can you hold my politics? Can you hold my queerness? Is this gonna work?” [These dialogues] helped put a layer of trust there.

Four participants discuss therapy more frequently than the previously mentioned ones. One participant receives mirroring from her therapist on the effect of how her patterns of activity impact her, seemingly with the intent to work with the participant on maximizing her capacity to take care of herself to maximize her capacity as a committed organizer.

We do talk about my activism, and I actually think what comes up the most is that she seems to be like “It just seems like you basically don’t take good enough care of yourself, and are constantly like just going headlong into like all these like projects,” ... That’s a way that like activism has come up in therapy with her.

She also noted that she has found this therapist’s validating and understanding nature refreshing after various experiences with her previous therapist, which seems to have deepened their ability to explore themes that emerge as a result of her organizing. She reported surprise

that the previous therapist requested the participant educate her on the basic principles of anarchism, after which point she said, “Aren’t you aware none of that’s going to happen?”

Another such participant who began treatment to process loss after leaving an organization credits work in therapy with reframing how he relates to the experience of shame that arose after that loss.

It took me the better part of a year of going every week before I was finally able to forgive myself ... it was just the most enormous weight off my shoulders ... the most enormous physical manifestation of emotional pain released, because up to that point, I had [experienced] this huge gut-wrenching pain of shame and guilt and to finally let that go, just felt so incredibly liberating.

One participant notes that she has had ongoing dialogue with her therapist help her assess the level of frustration that comes up in work with a collective organization.

[Organizing’s] come up a lot recently in the context of ... how frustrating it is to throw myself at it so wholeheartedly because ... [I end upset that] there’s always gonna be somebody incompetent messing up the [organizational systems]. Sometimes I get the vibe that she thinks that I’m being a bit judgmental.

She mentioned that she discusses examples of types of people whom she critiques, with these dynamics seen in dating and in collaboration with others at the organization. This process seems to have inspired her to do ongoing work in contemplating the following thoughts, which indicates the multiple levels of meaning and interpretation one can place on interpersonal relations from different lenses:

It's weird walking through life as being ... a way-left person because sometimes I do get the sense that I'm judging people unfairly a lot and then part of me is like "You're probably torn between, 'No, really, you are being too judgmental,' and, 'No, really, that person's actually an asshole.'"

One participant discusses the interpersonal dynamics in her organization and how that impacts her mood and social anxiety. She is responsive to validating statements her therapist has made, ranging from supporting her interest in quitting smoking as it would resist the practices of tobacco companies to statements such as:

Most of the time she [would discuss my activism like]: "I respect your idealism, I respect the work that you want to do, I respect the fact that in both your paid work and in ... your activism work, that you're committed to trying to leave the world a little bit better."

She however noticed that, "Sometimes she was just like, 'Can't you just quit this shit?'" Her long-term, sustained commitment to her organization is something that she is clear is an overall empowering experience for her, and it confounds her when therapists encourage her to leave the organization.

This is similar to the invalidating nature that another participant experienced with three therapists in recent years. He has been previously quoted as having a conflict with a therapist who found his participation "self-destructive and masochistic." He notes, "I've actually not had any therapists who are super-supportive of activism, which has been really discouraging."

This participant had weighed the pros and cons of attending a large rally and march as a street medic, which had also doubled as exposure therapy for panic symptoms he experiences in crowds. He felt invalidated by his therapist's overarching sense of concern for his safety versus

his own self-determined thought that the greatest risk he faced was a possible brief jail stay. This disconnect between their two value systems is evident in the debate that ensued:

And his entire response was to say, “Well, if it’s that dangerous, you just shouldn’t be there,” and I was like, “If it’s that dangerous, then I should be there,” and again, it’s two different world views and his idea of “One should avoid being in dangerous situations if you can,” and my point is, “If this matters so much and if we’re doing something so effective that they’re bringing out the big guns then we absolutely must keep going because something must happen.”

He also notes, “I do put a lot of my time and my energy and my money and resources into getting things done,” which is a primary motivation for both his activity and his activist identity development. The framing that he puts forward harkens another participant’s willingness to take risks and “live out of possibility” that is inherent in the decision-making process for activists to engage in a variety of actions to promote social and economic justice. Similarly, his desire to have a therapist who’d validate such decisions echoes another participant’s vision of promoting harm reduction principles beyond the realms of drug use and sex work to encourage “not trying to ban harmful behaviors just because you don’t like them.”

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This study serves to fill a gap in the literature about the intersections of activism and mental health issues, and why activists seek psychotherapy. This study promotes social work values by understanding the phenomenon of why those who promote social justice through activist work need mental health supports. If social workers can develop a greater understanding of demands and pressures on activists, this research stands to educate practitioners on how to provide competent care to assist activists in further empowering themselves.

This study has the potential to shape interventions to treat symptoms seen in activists based on education of psychotherapists on what issues are salient to activists when seeking treatment, and empowerment of activists in their work to promote social justice and social change. Furthermore, this study's findings have the potential to help therapists guide clients toward resources that are relevant to the population. An activist's increased level of capacity and self-efficacy can produce a synergistic effect within activist organizations and social movements, further promoting social justice.

As many psychotherapists are clinical social workers, they are bound by their Code of Ethics to promote social justice in whatever forms present themselves (National Association of Social Workers, 1999). Promoting therapists' awareness of specific issues and concerns facing clients who are activists will enhance the care provided to them. Given that multiple participants reported dialogues with therapists that were invalidating in nature, it is important that therapists prioritize client-centered interventions that seek to understand activists' experiences first and foremost. That is to say, while they may decide not to engage in personally or may not align

with their value systems, it is important that therapists validate the meaningful nature of activism as it functions within their clients' lives. Though activism manifests itself in actions and collective behaviors that differ from the advocacy work that many social workers engage in when promoting social justice and working against oppression, it appears that activists seek validation that all forms of promoting social justice are valid and valuable ways of being, and therapists, especially clinical social workers, are well positioned to honor a variety of forms of working toward social justice.

Identity Development

This study's results mirror the early activist identity development stages put forward in Heidi J. Holeman's (2007) dissertation *Awakening a Social Conscience: Toward a Model of Activist Identity Development* stating that activists tend to engage in volunteer or other service projects before a politicization process, which is followed by a call to action to do more in-depth work toward systemic social change. Participants' comments such as "I was seeing what was screwed up every day and I couldn't *not* do anything" or "having a sense of responsibility for making history which is ... a huge way of thinking of yourself in the world" reflect the inherently profound nature of this transformation process.

Statements such as "I feel like I'm leading a life I wasn't born to live" reflect a sense of feeling fortunate and in awe of engaging in meaningful action and relationships forged through organizing work. Similarly, this resembles Holeman's (2007) reflection that activists tend to experience a conversion process not dissimilar to those experienced by religious converts as this participant and others have found meaning and ways of being they would otherwise not have accessed if not for their activist work.

The strong sense of justice that activists uphold for the nature of the world also sets the benchmark for action and principle. This is evident through the sense of upholding just frameworks for relating to others and society, as conveyed in their statements such as “[being] a part of like a group of people who believe that justice can still prevail even though, there is no reason to believe that is like what keeps me motivated to be alive and keep engaging in society” and addressing racism while “feeling really passionate about it in a way [such that] I couldn’t not speak out against the things they were saying.”

With social justice envisioned as doing work to empower individuals and communities, to maximize resources for all, and to maximize the support and care people provide one another, participants have worked to re-shape relationships, as seen in the support provided within organizations, work to connect a variety of social movements and groups that would traditionally be kept apart, transformative justice work, and campaign work that works to deconstruct barriers presented by the criminal justice system and other institutions.

Interconnected Social Networks and Social Support

The conditions favorable for participants to become activists were in only one case strongly supported by a parent. The most consistent type of support received from family systems involved one of relatively unconditional support for the participants’ work while there is a disconnect between the participants’ experiences and ideologies and those of their parents and other family members.

Consistent throughout the study, participants noted the environment most conducive for developing an activist identity was that of an educational space, whether in high school, college, service-learning, or psychotherapy. The participants were presented ideas, whether through literature or direct observation of massive disparities in access to resources, that engaged them

with dismay, a sense of placing words to intersecting oppressions they have experienced, or exposure to critical analyses of socioeconomic conditions locally, nationally, and globally.

One participant's politicization at a college that "tends to churn out people who care about things" was representative of these experiences inasmuch as the milieu of multiple other students who demonstrate commitment to social change made it favorable for participants to engage with dialogues and writings that inspired political action. Participants reported a sense of inspiration when integrating themselves into groups of people who also cared about feminism, socialism, labor rights, issues facing people who are transgender or gender variant, anti-capitalist values, a desire to stop the wars that the U.S. engaged in in the 2000s, and a variety of other causes.

Activism, as one participant remarks, is a "human collaborative effort" that leads to ample observation of interpersonal dynamics that he occasionally discusses in therapy, provides fertile ground for the social networks that helped foster a sense of commonality. A strong sense of morality is conveyed through participants' work to resist unjust and oppressive systems and behaviors. In developing such commonalities, participants observed established a sense of mutuality and mutual commitment to a variety of causes and struggles serves to deepen bonds between those who have collaborated and formed solidarity together.

Relationships are important both in terms of those engaged in organizing, meetings, rallies, actions, and friendships forged as a result of knowing one another through organizations. The sense of common bond and common cause is evident throughout the eight interviews that involved dialogue about friends mostly being activists or politically-conscious and amongst the interviews that spoke to the importance of community. This phenomenon helps create the structures such that the city has a strong activist culture, particularly within the neighborhood in

which 11 participants live, which one participant noted is like “liv[ing] in a very tiny bubble, [a] political world.”

Participants seem to feel understood and supported within their organizational and friend networks, and seven remarked that their families of origin were to some degree supportive. These common experiences served as protective factors with regard to stress that their high level of commitment may incur.

Families

Participants had a range of experiences regarding their families of origin’s reactions to their participation in activist work. The researcher aimed to observe whether levels of support impacted patterns of participation.

There is not a consistent correlation between levels of support and patterns of participation. For those who display sustained participation, all levels of family support are present, three participants who experienced alienation or strained relationships with their family members display sustained commitment, five with support but a sense of difference from family members, and the one who received strong support. Similarly, those who have shifted between movements display participation levels that increase and decrease over time, and they illustrate a representative mix of levels of support from family systems.

As such, this points to the complex interplay between experiences in family systems, social networks, and the combination of each participant’s temperaments with the needs of their organizations. There is no essential theme that seems to emerge regarding the influence of family systems on participation, but the importance of families of origin as a type of support dovetails with the participants’ reports that receiving and giving support is an important facet of their work and important factor in building their capacities as activists.

Necessity of Commitment

Two-thirds (66.67%) of participants remarked that commitment involves hard work. Two participants' discussed their observations of how people can "sell out," which reflects a foundational desire not to live the life that could be *status quo* and thus prop up systems of oppression. One of these participants also noted that there are ways of living that can be less intensive in terms of time and energy, but that to continue doing necessary justice work requires a depth of commitment of resources and thought.

It's a lot easier to just be some like person who whatever, like lives by themselves and watches TV and like shops at Wal-Mart all the time or - you know what I mean? That's an easy way to be and it's not as easy to like live collectively and have to talk about everyone's feelings all the time and like all of the you know, which kind of bananas are we gonna buy?

The strong sense of justice and commitment to hard work and "constantly pushing each other to work all the time," as one participant noted, functions as the baseline for activity, such that one's internal and collective resources are given toward the mission of expanding the capacity for a large-scale national and global ability to meet people's basic needs. Participants spoke to this benchmark in their visions for what they hope to achieve through their work: hopes to meet everyone's resource needs; no more prisons and upending the systemic conditions that create crime; creating national networks of organizers; and bringing people together to work toward collective liberation.

Commitment serves to boost multiple participants' self-confidence and sense of meaning as well. Two participants noted that involvement helped reduce the severity of their social

anxiety, promote socialization, and also help them flex their skills with administrative tasks that support the missions of their organizations.

The risks that come with this are overwork and emotional exhaustion. One participant who is a paid organizer had previously framed the movement as her self-care until her health was “called into question” while working 60-80 hours per week for several years. Another experienced “crisis moments” where multiple organizations’ commitment coupled with the demands of taking on large projects to deconstruct grave injustices led to health problems and exhaustion as well.

Conflicts led to movement decline, and when one participant was functionally an outcast from his organization, he experienced distress, alienation, and social isolation as well. Conflicts that are captured in the participants’ experiences were helpful in exercising how to address oppressive behaviors that occur within movements. Yet it is reasonable that there is sadness and grief associated with the processes of interpersonal fallouts and movement declines that correlated with conflicts. As one participant noted, “to see those bonds kind of wither away is one of the saddest things.”

Participants whose organizations displayed a high level of health and attunement to members’ psychosocial needs tended to fare best in terms of sustainability organizationally and individually. Hard work seemed to feel less difficult when participants felt they were doing it with commitment while receiving love and support, and this attuned sense of support is seen in the culture of check-ins and emotion work reported. This phenomenon also confirms that when there is organizational health and an activist finds their work meaningful, an activist can more easily tolerate high levels of stress associated with their work to continue making that meaning (Gomes, 1992).

As a result of these findings, clinicians could hold greater awareness to pay attention to narratives that highlight organizational health in their clients' lives. As well, it is important to note that social workers can apply these lessons to the health of their own agencies and organizations, which would only serve to enhance their capacities and promote the health of their organizations, clients, and collaborators.

Is Burnout a Factor toward an Activist's Decision to Seek Psychotherapy?

Burnout is a noteworthy theme that emerged in the interviews, with half of participants reporting experiences with exhaustion, lack of satisfaction with their work, and disappointment when they scale back participation. Notably, the researcher did not ask any questions about burnout unless the participant brought the topic up first or alluded to it in latent content, which indicates that the topic is salient enough to be self-directed in half of the interviews.

Two participants were notably fatigued physically and spiritually to the point that they sought help from their therapists and support networks to reframe their relationships with movement work. Both have ushered in more balanced approaches and strategies that allow them to enhance their capacity versus working to the point of exhaustion. Others have experienced less guilt or anxiety surrounding their periods of reduced capacity through their ability to engage in dialogues that allow them to have more self-compassion with relation to their work, which seems empowering as a process.

To answer the research question, while two participants had striking narratives of accessing opportunities for self-care to treat their burnout, and multiple others are wary of risks and warning signs of burnout, burnout in and of itself is not a common factor in this sample of activists' reasons for seeking therapy. The organizational cultures that these participants circulate within seem invested in preventing burnout.

The highest risk for burning out is evident in one participant's narrative of her involvement as a campus activist:

There was a real dynamic of who's the hardest working activist in a way that's like policing each other, not supporting each other, working until you dropped in a way that was really unsustainable and judgmental and not healthy.

Notably, no participants reported experiencing any type of environments where "policing each other[']s]" level of involvement occurred after graduating from college. This phenomenon on college campuses perhaps mirrors the stridency period that Holeman (2007) cites is common among new activists, with that period followed by an increased emphasis on interpersonal effectiveness over self-righteousness.

One participant noted that it was difficult to balance the strategic campaign-focused work of the organization with anti-oppression dialogues. Another cited similar concerns in his organization's work to promote POC leadership. Nonetheless, while these are concerns in terms of balance, both acknowledged that the intention was to deepen understanding within the organizations regarding the impact of relational factors and sociocultural locations on the group dynamics, in turn aiming to deepen relational ties. Similarly, the phenomenon where one participant observed that his colleagues were "constantly pushing each other to work all the time," was coupled with support amongst group members. Though these examples indicate a sense of feeling drained or depleted as a result of such group processes, the groups themselves are careful to balance them with support or hopefulness toward the end of deepening the relational commitments between its members.

Burnout is a risk of involvement that most participants are careful to prevent through the act of ongoing monitoring of their behavioral patterns related to organizing and energy levels. As

it is a concern for half the participants, burnout is an associated topic that emerges in dialogues with therapists as participants explore whether their patterns of participation burn them out or not. It is marginally cited as a reason for seeking therapy, and functions as a salient topic in therapeutic dialogues when in intermediate stages of therapy, as opposed to burnout as a presenting problem during intake.

The act of working hard to prevent burnout seems more indicated in the nature of these participants. Participants are forthright in contrasting their current experiences with, say, when “22 or 23 ... [and] saying ‘yes’ to everything.” Given their awareness that such a state of being is fundamentally unjust to experience, the work that participants put into caring for themselves when experiencing exhaustion and reduced satisfaction with their work seems parallel to their commitment to working hard toward advancing social and economic justice.

Prevalence of Eating Disorders within the Sample

The prevalence of participants who have received treatment for eating disorders is at a greater rate of that of the general population. The prevalence of eating disorders within this study was 33.33%. Within the general population, prevalence rates vary by diagnoses (Rikani et al., 2013; Smink, van Hoeken, & Hoek, 2012): 1.0-2.4% for Anorexia Nervosa; 1.0-1.7% for Bulimia Nervosa; and up to 2.4% for Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (which includes Binge Eating Disorder). This displays a disparity between rates in the general population and this sample.

The actual extent of this disparity may not be as wide as that due to the nature of epidemiological assessments of eating disorders. It is common for people who are symptomatic to conceal their symptoms, avoid care, and, amongst men, feel reluctance to receive such

diagnoses (Rikani et al., 2013; Smink, van Hoeken, & Hoek, 2012). As a result, rates may be higher in the general population and this sample's rates may not be as divergent as they appear.

As well, sampling for community studies on eating disorders discounts a variety of factors related to sociocultural factors that can lead to varying prevalence rates of eating disorders: exposure to Western cultural values can lead to increased prevalence of eating disorders (Rikani et al., 2013; Smink, van Hoeken, & Hoek, 2012); prevalence of symptoms may differ between races possibly due to acculturation pressures, with for example Native American women experiencing greater rates of symptomatology than the general population (Boisvert & Harrell, 2012); higher rates of binge eating occur among African Americans and Latino/as than the general population (Thompson-Brenner et al., 2013); and barriers to ongoing treatment are likely for people who qualify as of low socioeconomic status (Thompson-Brenner et al., 2013). These factors indicate the complex social and relational phenomenon that eating disorder symptomatology represents, which is exemplified in Boisvert & Harrell's (2013) model of eating disorder symptomatology in men resulting from the interchange of pressures between age, race, body mass index, body shame, spirituality/religiosity, and symptomatology.

These findings indicate that pressures experienced by those who embody complex sociocultural identities, particularly those who experience oppression, may have greater proclivity toward experiencing eating disorder symptoms. By extension, this study's sample, which includes people who represent a variety of populations that experience oppression and multiple stressors, may indicate a higher likelihood for developing symptoms of eating disorders. The study's small sample size (N=12) may also lead to a higher rate than one would encounter with a larger sample.

The nature of participants' experiences with eating disorders was not the focus of the interview and participants chose how much they discussed regarding their symptoms and treatment. The researcher did not follow-up with clarifying questions, but engaged in an open dialogue about the variety of problems that drew participants to therapy. One participant mentioned being in recovery while the others mentioned that their treatment and symptoms were associated with their careers as high school or college students and it may be inferred that they were also in recovery as well.

Personality traits common in people who experience eating disorders include "impulsivity, novelty seeking, stress reactivity, harm avoidance, [and] perfectionism" (Rikani et al., 2013, p. 160). These traits seem to intersect with the drive to work hard, seek out such work that creates meaning, and possibly experience distress as a result of that work and other co-occurring experiences in one's life.

This is an intriguing finding that the researcher did not anticipate. The literature on social movements did not convey any intersections between participation in activist work and features of eating disorders. The lack of association in the literature and in prior knowledge of the population can be parallel to the sense of secrecy that is associated with stigmatization regarding eating disorders. Furthermore, as a result of these stigmas and a variety of sociocultural factors that can make eating disorder prevalence rates vary across populations, this may close the gap between the prevalence of eating disorders in the general population and in this sample.

The researcher and participants engaged in these dialogues to discuss eating disorders as a precipitating factor for beginning treatment, and did not discuss in depth the nature, meaning, and sources of symptoms. As such, the researcher cannot conclude any reasons as to why this

correlation exists, and sees exploration into the nature of this correlation as an area for future research.

Common Factors in Seeking Therapy

All participants sought therapy for a variety of distressing situations. Four participants relayed that their presenting problems at certain courses of treatment were related to their organizing work. Two reported they began treatment as the result of features of burnout and one began treatment after being forced out of an organization. One participant sought treatment for aggressive fantasies that were directed at a variety of people including ones she'd met in the context of organizing.

There is crossover with general relational complaints in that two of those participants have had multiple courses of treatment. The variety of presenting problems indicate a combination of distress as a teenager, likely within the relational field of their families of origin; treatment for depression; treatment for complex grief; treatment for social anxiety; and treatment initially sought to assess risk with suicidal ideation.

These indicate the nature of activists to have developed within stressful family systems, as seen in those treated while adolescents, and developing as an adult and/or activist within social environments that demand participants' resources of time and energy. Participants perhaps have conditioned themselves to work hard and deplete emotional reserves.

There are several protective factors that participants have in place to shore up their emotional reserves: finding reward in their paid work, finding reward in their activist work, cognitive strategies that help reduce the amount of negative affects or defeatist attitudes, prioritizing time with friends and family, balancing in self-care activities, and romantic relationships. But given the demands of time that are potentially drawn from strong convictions

to carry out meaningful work, it may be difficult to balance a wide array of activities. Similarly, given the effects of, as one participant noted, the phenomenon of an internalized demand for productivity that stems from values associated with capitalism, participants are at risk of figuratively “burning the candle at both ends” and experiencing mood states and anxiety that are distressing in nature.

Activism as a Topic within Therapy

It is noteworthy that participants experienced a range of reactions from their therapists to their activism. The majority of these experiences can broadly be categorized as either invalidating or treating underlying problems that manifest in their organizing. Two participants noted that their work in therapy provides systemic relief of symptoms such that they can increase their capacities as activists. These two reflected their tendencies toward overwork and that therapy has helped them build in a variety of practices to increase the amount of care they provide themselves.

Others, however, have had the unfortunate experiences of having offensive, apathetic, or invalidating statements cast at them due to situations that arise as a result of activism. The hope that seems to arise from that experience, especially with the participant whose therapist promoted the idea that his activism was in some way “like a form of self-harm and an expression of self-destruction and masochism” indicates the misattunements that can arise when a therapist speaks from a divergent value system while not seemingly seeking to provide client-centered reflection honoring of the client’s perspective.

Holding environments were common, though, especially as remarked upon by the participant who mentioned an established trusting holding environment with her therapist, all the while conducted as feminist therapy.

Two participants utilized therapy to process entrenched interpersonal conflicts that arose in their organizing work, with one finding his therapists supportive in processing and containing distress developed after being forced to leave an organization. This reflects that activist work can be a very salient topic in therapy when the interpersonal dynamics experienced become difficult to cope with.

Conclusions

Activists appear to hold complex identities as organizers in addition to those developed within their family systems, social networks, and professional organizational environments. As seen in the narratives within this study's sample, the identities developed reflect meaningfulness and awe amongst the participants, with this narrative functioning as a benefit similar to that which Holeman (2007) notes benefits society at large through the ability of activists to change systems, policies, and norms throughout society.

Due to awareness of the possibilities, opportunities, and “political horizons” – to draw on Gould's (2009) terminology – that participants have engaged with throughout their activist careers, they have committed their energy and work, whether in the past or on an ongoing basis, to work that they describe in such meaningful and emboldened terms as “the struggle,” “the revolution,” “connect[ing] people in different struggles together so that we can see that we don't want to be pitted against each other,” “something that matters,” and “the movement.”

The observation that the infrastructure of the city, society, and global society has structurally inequitable systems necessitates a conflictual stance with the people and institutions that perpetuate such systems of oppression. As such, the rhetoric associated with the processes for making desired changes that require collective effort denotes that tension, as heard in dialogues about struggles and “battlegrounds for people's rights.”

This orientation of opposition requires considerable energy as an activist will confront deeply entrenched power structures, whether at an institutional level or as seen in the actions participants have made to deconstruct oppressive and patriarchal behaviors that have arisen within their groups. This indicates the baseline nature of organizing as one that depletes one's internal emotional resources as one configures their work to deconstruct social forces and systems that are difficult to untangle.

As such, it appears that the primary drive of participants' organizing work is to identify injustices in various sociopolitical environments and mobilize the necessary energy to address and hopefully deconstruct them. In turn, as the energy mobilized can be depleting, participants have utilized a variety of strategies to balance out this process of depletion.

This necessitates the importance of doing practices that denote care for oneself, which function as protective factors: building community, engaging in relaxation practices, leisure activities, hobbies, dating, and exercise. It is important to note that these are not mutually exclusive from activism, which is an important form of self-care for many participants. As one participant noted "whether that ... is going on a hike or feeding the homeless, it's a toss-up."

This is parallel to a participant who framed movement work as self-care, and though she has scaled back her involvement, she sees other self-care practices as factors that build her capacity to engage with her movement work, which she continues to find deeply meaningful. There are numerous important relationships participants have developed through their work, in addition to other factors that enhance their quality of lives as a result of their work: increased self-confidence; increased socialization; increased sense of efficacy in the world; hope for the future; and meaningful check-ins at meetings that deepen bonds and provide an important relational buffer to how drained one can be as a result of the work. As such, all these function as

protective factors against the risks of burnout and emotional exhaustion that can result from activism.

The participants in this study structure their lives so as to honor the fact that risks to their emotional health may emerge, while building in necessary structures to sustain them and their organizations. This balance may shift at times. Extenuating stressors such as health problems emerging, conflict, break-ups, divorces that impact family dynamics, overwhelm with school, difficulties with social anxiety, and distressing symptoms add additional layers of pressure and emotional depletion that can tip the balance that activists have established with the structure of their lives. As a result, it seems that the reasons that activists seek psychotherapy are a combination of distress that arises when stressors mount to the point that the structures of their daily lives are stretched so thin that their disposition develops more negative affect than positive affect, resulting in symptoms associated with depression, grief, or anxiety. Regarding the findings that there has been a prevalence of participants seeking treatment for eating disorders or phobias, it is possible that such stress is displaced into symptoms that are possibly compulsive or avoidant in nature.

It appears that participants are resourced well enough to respond to this sense of drain, all having found therapists when overwhelmed with their presenting problems. In addition, they rely on a variety of supports including friends from within and outside of movements, family members when supportive, meditative and relaxation strategies, support groups, and religious and spiritual practices. The stance of battle and struggle is also softened with self-compassionate practices that defuse the difficult emotions that can be associated with the most difficult aspects of their organizing, enhancing their capacity to meet challenges where they are “ready to fight!”

Notably, one participant contains their work to one organization to prevent burnout when working a justice-oriented and emotionally draining job, and another re-structured his life as a result of deciding to “do personhood differently.” Both of these participants maintain strong relational ties with friends, partners, and dates that are connected with movement work. It seems important that the former participant maintains the structure of how they balance their paid work with their activist work so that their activism does not in the end burn them out, and the latter appears to have an evolving personality that at this time respects, but does not necessitate, involvement in organizing work.

Participants seem to respond to emotional cues, whether to such an extreme as a “crisis moment” or experiencing burnout, and were aware of therapy as a resource to help prevent deepening crises.

Across the study’s sample, there are no distinct factors that indicate participants seek therapy for specific reasons, including burnout. However, this study’s findings indicate that there are broad categories of pressures the lead an activist to seek therapy, which include relational complications, including loss (e.g. leaving an organization, experiencing a break-up, grieving someone’s death); distress associated with symptoms; and the aforementioned sense of imbalance that emerges with new and confounding stressors. Participants’ hopefulness to maximize their capacities to continue advocating against oppression and for social and economic justice indicates their willingness to utilize work in therapy to help them do so.

Limitations

The researcher aimed to build a representative sample in terms of sociocultural locators, and the diversity seen in many such identity features helped meet this goal partially. However, despite using both purposive and snowball sampling to reach out to activists of color, the

researcher did not recruit any participants of color, and as such, the perspectives that People of Color may have brought to the dialogues that may differ from those fielded in the interviews are not present here. Also, given the nature of this study's use of non-probability sampling methods, this study's results are not generalizable.

Similarly, elders' perspectives are missing as well as young adults who are currently in their late teens or early 20s who, if interviewed, could have been experiencing some of the awe-inspiring and also draining experiences participants reported experiencing while in college.

Also notable is that the sample was predominately comprised of people who identified as queer (n=9). Though reflexivity was monitored throughout the study, the researcher did not incorporate questions that may elicit an idea of how the essence of being an activist has any distinctions or similarities from being a queer activist. The data reveal that activism has enabled some participants to more fully embrace their queer identities, and that queer organizing and community-building was important in their work. However, the dialogues did not focus on going in-depth into understanding the essences of these experiences, and doing so is another realm for future research. The study's findings may indicate perspectives that are representative of queer sub-cultures.

Future research

As mentioned in Limitations, interviews with activists of color, elders, and 18-23 year old activists may provide a wider variety of perspectives to assess further whether the essential nature of experiences reported in this study are consistent with broader ranges of sociocultural locations.

Future research includes conducting comparative studies of experiences of activists who identify as queer and those who do not, which would derive whether there are experiences consistent between both populations and whether there are experiences distinct to those who identify as queer. Such research may elicit nuanced themes that are common in the narratives of those who identify as queer.

Regarding identity development, this study did not focus intently on the stages or evolution of one's activist identity development, though it may be beneficial for future research to investigate where participants are on Holeman's (2007) model of maturity and identity integration. This leaves the researcher with a general idea of activist's identity development through the lens of participants' narratives, but future research could aim to have more distinct dialogues about the evolution of the participants' identity development processes and whether various stages' features impact the nature of presenting problems in therapy.

The high prevalence of experiences with eating disorders within this study is noteworthy, and no conclusions can be drawn as to the reason for this correlation. Given that 33.33% of the sample reported having had treatment for an eating disorder, future research would explore whether there are common factors associated with development of symptoms and development of an activist identity.

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Appendix A: Human Subjects Review Board Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

January 21, 2014

Collin Lee

Dear Collin,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Danna Bodenheimer, Research Advisor

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form**Consent to Participate in a Research Study****Smith College ● Northampton, MA**

.....

Title of Study: Why Activists Seek Psychotherapy**Investigator(s):**

Collin Lee, Smith College School for Social Work, xxx.xxx.xxxx

.....

Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study exploring the reasons why activists seek psychotherapy. You were selected as a possible participant because you identify as an activist and have within the last 2 years participated in a social movement organization and

have accessed psychotherapy from a licensed clinician or student intern. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

In consenting to participate in this study, you also confirm that you are 18 years of age or older.

Purpose of Study

- The purpose of the study is to understand the reasons why activists decide to seek care from a psychotherapist.
- This study is being conducted as a thesis requirement for my master's in social work degree.
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Description of the Study Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

- Coordinate with the researcher to set up a date and time for your interview (5-15 minutes).
- Conduct an interview to discuss why you're an activist and why you've sought therapy (30-45 minutes).

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

- The study has the following risk: you may experience mild discomfort as the interview material may lead you to remember emotionally challenging memories.
- If you experience discomfort with the interview process or any particular questions, you can decline to answer any question and can opt to end the interview at any time. If you decide to end the interview early, the researcher will provide you a resource list for information and referrals.

Benefits of Being in the Study

The benefits of participation are:

- Having an opportunity to talk about the reasons why you are an activist and why you have sought psychotherapy, which you may find empowering.
- Gaining insight into the connections between your roles as an activist and as a psychotherapy client.
- Contributing to research on social movements, activists, and the process of seeking psychotherapy.

Confidentiality

- The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. The researcher will store audio recordings in electronic files secured using a password protected file. The researcher will keep your files secured for at least 3 years. We

will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments

- You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely at any point during the study. If you choose to withdraw, the researcher will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify the researcher of your decision to withdraw by email or phone by May 1, 2014. After that date, your information will be part of the thesis, dissertation or final report.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Collin Lee, at xxxxx@smith.edu or by

telephone at xxx.xxx.xxxx. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Review of Findings

- You have the option to review the findings of this study. Upon request, you may have access to a summary of findings or the researcher's complete thesis the research submits his thesis, no later than the final thesis submission date of June 20, 2014.

Consent

- Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study researcher.

.....

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

.....

[if using audio or video recording, use next section for signatures:]

1. I agree to be audio taped for this interview:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

2. I agree to be interviewed, but I do not want the interview to be taped:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Demographics Questionnaire

Smith College • Northampton, MA

.....

Title of Study: Why Activists Seek Psychotherapy

Investigator(s): Collin Lee, Smith College School for Social Work

xxxxx@smith.edu // xxx.xxx.xxxx

1. What is your name? _____
2. What is your age? _____
3. What is your gender? _____
4. What is your race? _____
 - a. What is your ethnic group? _____
5. What is your socio-economic status? _____
6. What is your sexuality? _____
7. Do you have a disability?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Prefer Not to Disclose
8. If you are available for follow-up questions, or would like a summary of my findings or copy of my thesis, please provide your contact information:

Appendix D: List of Mental Health Care Resources

Resources available if you experience a crisis

Numbers to Call:

- The City of Philadelphia's Suicide & Crisis Intervention Hotline: 215.686.4420
- The National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 800.273.8255
- 911

Local Crisis Response Centers:

Einstein Crisis Response Center <i>Germantown/Manayunk/Roxborough/Mt. Airy</i> Germantown Community Health Services 1 Penn Blvd. Philadelphia, PA 19144 215.951.8300	Friends Hospital Crisis Response Center <i>Northeast Philadelphia</i> 4641 Roosevelt Blvd. Philadelphia, PA 19124 215.831.2600
Hall-Mercer Crisis Response Center <i>Center City & South Philadelphia</i> 245 S. 8 th St. Philadelphia, PA 19107 215.829.5433	Temple University/Episcopal Crisis Response Center <i>North Philadelphia</i> 100 East Lehigh Ave. Philadelphia, PA 19125
Mercy Hospital Crisis Response Center <i>West Philadelphia</i> 5401 Cedar Ave. Philadelphia, PA 19143 215.748.9525	

Referrals for Mental Health Care

AGENCIES AND CLINICIANS OFFERING SLIDING FEE SCALE THERAPY IN PHILADELPHIA

Mazzoni Center: Open Door Counseling

Philadelphia's LGBT Health Care & Wellness Center

21 South 12th Street, 8th Floor

Philadelphia, PA 19107

Sean McNamara, Intake Specialist: 215.563.0652, ext. 248

<http://www.mazzonicenter.org>

Council for Relationships

3 Locations in Philadelphia:

Avenue of the Arts

315 S. Broad St.

Philadelphia, PA 19107

215.382.6680

Center City

1880 JFK Blvd., Ste. 1810

Philadelphia, PA 19103

215.575.9140

University City

4025 Chestnut Street

Philadelphia, PA 19104

215.382.6680

<http://www.councilforrelationships.org>

Philadelphia Consultation Center

313 South 16th Street

Philadelphia, PA 19102

215.732.8244, ext. 611

<http://www.pcctherapy.com>

Women's Therapy Center

Women's Therapy Center is a private, non-profit psychotherapy center providing affordable, high-quality therapeutic services for adult women. We provide services from a feminist perspective, ensuring that women find the therapist and services that best meet their needs. For anyone living as a woman.

1315 Walnut Street Suite # 1004 Philadelphia, PA 19107

215.5671111

<http://www.womenstherapycenter.org>

The Lapido Group

African-American and Black therapists and counselors providing individual therapy, family therapy, marriage and couple therapy to the Black and African-American communities in Philadelphia and surrounding areas.

255 South 17th Street, Ste. 1106 Philadelphia, PA 19103

(215) 745-7117

<http://www.thelapidogroup.com>

Damon M. Constantinides, PhD, LCSW

1315 Spruce St.

Philadelphia, PA 19107

607.592.2173

<http://www.therapistdamon.com>

Appendix E: General Resources

Helpful Resources for the Activist who seeks Healing

Books to Read

Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self while Caring for Others

Laura van Dernoot Lipsky with Connie Burk

The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse

Ellen Bass & Laura Davis

Doris: An Anthology, and

The Encyclopedia of Doris: Stories, Essays, & Interviews

Cindy Crabb has been writing her influential, autobiographical, feminist zine, *Doris*, since the early 1990s. She has collected various narratives on self-care and accessing mental health care. These titles are the collections of all *Doris* zines as well as newly published writings.

Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself

Melody Beattie

Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness, and
Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life

Jon Kabat Zinn

Zines

Doris zine by Cindy Crabb & ***Cheer the Eff Up*** zine by Jonas

Info available at <http://www.dorisdorisdoris.com/> or by USPS at Cindy Crabb / P.O. Box 29 / Athens, OH 45701

Friends Make the Best Medicine: A Guide to Creating Community Mental Health Support Networks

Assembled by The Icarus Project

Available at <http://www.theicarusproject.net/resources>

Supporting Ourselves: Personal Stories, Practical Info, Political Issues

from Activist Trauma Support, available at <https://www.activist-trauma.net/assets/files/ATSzine1.pdf>

Self as Other: Reflections on Self-Care

CrimethInc.

Available at http://cloudfront.crimethinc.com/pdfs/self-as-other_for-screen.pdf

Or by mail at CrimethInc.; P.O. Box 13998; Salem, OR 97309-1998

Online Communities

The Icarus Project

“The Icarus Project envisions a new culture and language that resonates with our actual experiences of 'mental illness' rather than trying to fit our lives into a conventional framework. We are a network of people living with and/or affected by experiences that are commonly diagnosed and labeled as psychiatric conditions.”

<http://www.theicarusproject.net/>

Philly Icarus: philly.radicalmentalhealth@gmail.com

Activist Trauma Support

“This site is primarily for political activists who may be injured during or by their political activities and or struggling with other mental health issues related to activism.”

<http://www.activist-trauma.net/>

Political Community Centers

A-Space Anarchist Community Center

4722 Baltimore Ave.; Philadelphia, PA 19143

215.821.6877 (Voicemail Only)

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/A-Space-Anarchist-Community-Center/30987050865>

Wooden Shoe Books & Records: An Anarchist Bookstore

704 South St.; Philadelphia, PA 19147

215.413.0999

<http://www.woodenshoebooks.com>

Other Practices and Centers

Acupuncture

Both of these clinics operate on a \$15-35 Sliding Scale fee

West Philly Community Acupuncture

4636 Woodland Ave.; Philadelphia, PA 19143

518.506.4540

https://www.facebook.com/westphillyca?ref=br_tf

Philadelphia Community Acupuncture

538 Carpenter Ln.

Philadelphia, PA 19119

215.844.2774

<http://www.phillyacupuncture.com>

Holistic Care

Ahimsa House

The Ahimsa House is a center for practices of peace & mindful living.

We hold meditations, yoga classes, spiritual teachings, group processing, and individual healing sessions.

5007 Cedar Ave.; Philadelphia, PA 19143

<http://www.ahimsahousephilly.org/>

Yoga

Studio 34

Offers \$6 community classes, Work Exchange, and Pay-What-You-Can classes.

4522 Baltimore Ave.; Philadelphia, PA 19143

215.387.3434

<http://www.studio34yoga.com/>

Meditation

See previously listed books by Jon Kabat Zinn and information about Ahimsa House

A guided Loving Kindness Meditation

presented by the University of New Hampshire Health Services:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sz7cpV7ERsM>

Guided Imagery

Free Downloads of Guided Imagery from Belleruth Naparstek and Health Journeys

Guided imagery programs engage your mind, body, and spirit to help you to reduce stress, focus on healthy changes, & promote healing.

Google “Health Videos & Podcasts” “Kaiser Permanente” or go to:

https://healthy.kaiserpermanente.org/health/care/!ut/p/ao/FchBDoMgEADAt_iAzYZEYfFmhH6hhdsGiZIIgELt99seZ9DjC33hO-3cUy18_uxCLD22md9bqnCnLVZ8okd_Nd4zoysVAocj_o9bT-GM6IzVap2MBamlBCGsgEWPBohoUkKp8UErXjnTZxmGL2IKPp!/

https://www.healthjourneys.com/kaiser/download/download_relieveStress.asp and
<http://www.healthjourneys.com/>

Appendix F: Recruitment Letter

I am Collin Lee and I am a second-year Master of Social Work student conducting research at Smith College School for Social Work for my thesis. **I am recruiting adults (age 18 or older) who live in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who identify as activists and who have accessed or are currently in psychotherapy to identify reasons why activists seek psychotherapy.**

I am a person who identifies as an activist and have participated in a variety of social movements. Given the pressures activists experience, I am interested in doing this research to identify what reasons lead an activist to seek a therapist. My hope for this research is to help social workers and therapists understand the complexity of reasons that influence activists to access psychotherapy. This research can help the field of social work by helping therapists provide more competent care to clients who are activists, with the benefit of increasing the activist's capacity to work for social change and deepen relationships with those with whom they advocate.

For the purposes of the study, **activists are people who have participated in a social movement organization or group that promotes social change** (action-oriented group, advocacy group, community organization focused on social change, identity politics group, online activism). **Participation must have been within the past 2 years.**

Participants must have accessed psychotherapy within the last 2 years, attending at least 4 sessions. Psychotherapy is participation in treatment for psychological disorders in the form of talk therapy. Psychotherapy must be provided by a clinician licensed as a Clinical Social Worker, Clinical Psychologist, PsyD (Doctor of Psychology), Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Psychiatrist, or student intern in these fields.

You may be on hiatus from activism and/or psychotherapy, but you must have participated in both within the last two years.

This study takes approximately 30-45 minutes and will be conducted through face-to-face interviews at a location convenient to you. Face-to-face interviews are preferred, but if a telephone or Skype interview is most convenient for you, please communicate this to the researcher. The interviews and participants' identifying information will be kept confidential. Participation in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions, feel free to contact me at xxxxx@smith.edu or [xxx.xxx.xxxx](tel:xxx.xxx.xxxx).

Appendix G: Recruitment Flyer

***Are you an activist who has had psychotherapy?
Would you like to contribute to research on
why activists seek therapy?***



I am Collin Lee and I am a second-year Master's in Social Work student conducting research at Smith College School for Social Work for my thesis. I am recruiting adults (age 18 or older) who live in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who are **activists who have accessed or are currently in psychotherapy to identify reasons why activists seek psychotherapy.**

For the purposes of the study, **activists are people who have participated in a social movement organization or group that promotes social change** (action-oriented group, advocacy group, community organization focused on social change, identity politics group, online activism). **Participation must have been within the past 2 years.**

Participants must have accessed psychotherapy within the last 2 years, attending at least 4 sessions.

You may be on hiatus from activism and/or psychotherapy, but you must have participated in both within the last two years.

This study takes approximately 30-45 minutes and will be conducted through face-to-face interviews. The interviews and participants' identifying information will be kept confidential. Participation in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

**If you are interested in participating or have any questions,
contact Collin Lee at [REDACTED]@smith.edu or [REDACTED].**

Collin Lee
Study on Activism & Therapy

Collin Lee
Study on Activism
& Therapy

Collin Lee
Study on Activism & Therapy

Collin Lee
Study on Activism & Therapy

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Study on Activism & Therapy

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Study on Activism & Therapy

Collin Lee
Study on Activism & Therapy

Collin Lee
Study on Activism & Therapy

Appendix H: Interview Guide

1. What is your preferred gender pronoun?
2. What drew you into activism?
 - a. What social problems concerned you that led you to activism?
 - b. What types of projects or organizations have you worked on or with?
3. What meaning does activism have for you?
 - a. How has your activist work affected your quality of life?
 - b. What are important memories or significant events from your work?
 - c. What emotional significance do you attach to your activist work?
4. Ideally, what would you like to see the outcomes of your activism to be?
5. Tell me about the group dynamics in the organization you work with.
 - a. Have you noticed whether forces within the group challenge you?
6. How do influential people in your life (family members, close friends, colleagues, fellow activists) react to your participation in the group/social movement?
 - a. If the participant indicates stress surrounding this issue: Have you felt pulled in opposing directions because of this dynamic?
7. Tell me about what happened in the community at that time that prompted you to organize versus what you were feeling when you didn't feel like you could be involved.
8. Tell me about any demands you may have from other areas of your life that make participation in activism difficult for you. Examples of these demands include paid work, volunteer work, family, parenting, social networks, etc.
9. How do you take care of yourself? Or, what do you do for self-care?
10. What was happening in your life at the time you decided to seek psychotherapy?

- a. When did you first access a therapist?
 - b. How many periods of time have you engaged in therapy?
11. Do you discuss any topics from your activist work in psychotherapy?
12. How does your work in therapy support your role as an activist?
- a. Does therapy function as a support when you feel activist burnout?

Before we conclude the interview, is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?